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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION

Initial reports of States parties due in 1999

Addendum

Oman

[5 July 1999]

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Introduction

1. Since the advent in 1970 of the auspicious renaissance under the leadership of His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed, the Sultanate of Oman has devoted special care to children and their welfare. Children's well-being is at the centre of the Sultanate's plans and programmes for family development, improving the standard of living and providing parents with essential assistance and guidance. Parents need to be equipped to undertake their duties to raise, care for, and manage their child's affairs. Parents need to satisfy their children's needs for medical care, social services and a strong education so that these children may become effective members of the community.

2. With this national leadership and the continued determination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified through Royal Decree No. (54/96 as amended). This ratification further stimulates and re-energizes the series of efforts originating within the Sultanate's various government agencies and institutions. All levels of government aim to improve the status of children by meeting their requirements for a decent living, a progressively better life and protection from harm. The Sultanate plans to accomplish these goals by adhering to the provisions of the Convention and implementing the National Plan for Children. With support from UNICEF, representatives from the four fields of health, education, social affairs and disability affairs drafted the National Plan for Children.

3. On 9 December 1985 Royal Decree No. 85/92 was issued on the promulgation of the National Committee for the Care of Children, the most important task of which was to propose policies and programmes within the context of child care. The Committee is held responsible for coordinating governmental efforts regarding plans of action and related projects as well as looking into child-related issues that are presented before Arab and international gatherings, and for following up the implementation of what is agreed.

4. On 29 October 1997, when Royal Decree No. 71/97 was issued to reconstitute the National Committee for the Care of Children, its provisions were deemed to be part of the Sultanate's law. The National Committee is mandated to conduct studies and detailed research, establish programmes and implement plans and strategies to coordinate the concerned bodies. Within the scope of a comprehensive and integrated national plan, these bodies are empowered to study and evaluate the efforts to implement the provisions of the Convention.

5. The immediate outcome of these efforts has emerged and is documented in the international reports testifying to the Sultanate's leading role in fully discharging its obligations to the Sultanate's children. The UNICEF Report on The State of the World's Children 1998 praises the achievements of the Sultanate and names Oman as a leading nation in the improvement of the lives of its children by establishing their health and social programmes for them. The report emphasized the Sultanate's efforts to provide those primary medical services that have rapidly reduced the mortality rate for children under 5 years of age to the very good level of 18 per 1,000 live births.

6. The international recognition accorded to the Sultanate has strengthened its determination to set even higher standards for the well-being of its children. The Sultanate plans to identify the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities available to ensure the future of the

Sultanate's children within a comprehensive social policy. This policy, vigorously developed by the Sultanate under the leadership of H.M. Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed, will promote individual lifelong development as a national goal.

7. For these reasons the Sultanate has the pleasure to submit this first report on its implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

A. Measures adopted to coordinate law and national policy with the provisions of the Convention

8. Since 1970 the care, patronage and protection of children have been fundamental legal and national policy goals for the Sultanate. These laws and policies were in effect even before the Sultanate joined the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Policies relating to the child have existed at all levels of the Sultanate's Government to address the child's special needs for physical, mental and social development.

9. Since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (adopted by the Sultanate in 1996), the Sultanate's laws and policies have been directed towards convergence with the provisions of the Convention.

10. This section of the report briefly highlights some Royal Decrees, laws and decisions relating to the Sultanate's children. The contents and implications of these Royal Decrees, laws and decisions will be dealt with extensively in the chapters and topics of this report.

11. Issues addressed in this report include the various aspects of the child's life and his relationship with the various parties.

1. Relationship of the child with the parents and other family members

12. Royal Decree No. 32/97 on the Personal Law and section 6.0 on the family environment relate to the child within the family context.

13. The implementation of the Personal Law (sect. 139), through Royal Decree No. 32/97, addressed family matters including marriage, parental responsibility for children, rules governing divorce, the consequences of divorce for inheritance, and transfer of rights to general heirs and family members. This Decree strengthens and fosters the stability and security of marriage in the Sultanate. The Decree is in accordance with the principles of Islamic Sharia requiring that families satisfy their children's legitimate rights for a decent and progressive life.

14. Among the provisions established by this law is the stipulation of 18 years as the minimum age for marriage (sect. 7). This provision applies equally to both genders, prevents marriage of underage individuals and helps establish harmonious and safe family relations. It should be noted that this law also established 18 years as the majority age (legal adulthood).

15 The law prescribes the general principles for family relations, the most important of which are mutual respect, good companionship, preservation of family welfare, and collaborative care for children and their upbringing. The law also sets out provisions regarding parental financial responsibility for daughters and sons, conditions, and entitlement. For example, a father is obligated to his daughter until her marriage and to his son until he is earning a living after completing his education (sect. 60). When the father is deceased, insolvent or fails to pay, and in absence of a capable guardian, the expenditure is incurred by the solvent mother (sect. 62).

16 Endeavouring to secure the stability of the family and fostering its strength, the Personal Law provides for judicial divorce, binding the presiding judge to exert best efforts to reach reconciliation between spouses, as a priority (sect. 101) and if no agreement is reached, the judge appoints two arbitrators, individuals he considers capable of assisting with a reconciliation in the case (sect. 102).

17 The Personal Law also contains detailed provisions for the custody of children and favours granting custody to the individual who is best able to raise, protect and guard the child's welfare (sect. 126/4). If the custodian is a woman she shall be free to exercise her custodianship independently provided that she is not married to a non-blood relative of the child (sect. 127/a).

18 To ensure financial support for the child and mother, Royal Decree No. 115 and 116/94 permits withholding of salaries. Other provisions of the Personal Law ensure that child support has priority over all other debts (sect. 47).

2. Improving administration of the juvenile justice system

19 The Oman Penal Law issued through Royal Decree No. 7/74 includes a number of provisions regarding children that, in many ways, satisfy the requirements of article 40 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. By virtue of this Law juveniles under 18 years are assured the right to procedures appropriate to their age, preservation of their dignity, and a programme for integration back into the community.

20 Chapter VIII, section B of this report provides detailed data and information about this system and the improvements to be incorporated into it by the draft laws regarding juveniles and the prisons, issued by Royal Decree No. 48/98. These draft laws comply with the provisions of article 40 of the Convention.

21 It is important to note that section 21/7 of the Prisons Regulations No. 28/94 requires that prisoners less than 18 years are to be provided with habitation, work, bathing, and exercise time separate from adult prisoners. Section 59/6, paragraphs C and D, of this law provide that women prisoners bearing children during incarceration must receive the original birth certificate following discharge. No reference can be made on the certificate to the child's birth occurring in prison.

3. Prohibiting employment of underage children and protecting them against economic exploitation

22. The employment of underage children in the Sultanate is virtually non-existent. All children enjoy education at institutions located across the Sultanate. Details and further information are found in chapter VII of this report.

23. A review of the current labour law is likely to incorporate additional measures protecting children by raising the minimum age of employment, which is now 13 years, to a minimum of 16 years. Beginning in 1998/99, the age of 16 will correspond to the age at which basic education is normally completed. The current law prohibits employment of children less than 16 years on night shifts, or in heavy or dangerous work. It is anticipated that additional reform will strengthen this law by guaranteeing similar protection to children less than 18 years in accordance with ILO Convention No. 138.

4. Non-nationals living with their children

24. The Foreigners Sojourn Law (sect. 14) issued by Royal Decree No. 16/95 requires the Inspector General for Police and Customs to specify classes of sojourn (e.g. temporary stay, travel) in the Sultanate, conditions for its issue, and rules and procedures of its renewal. In a case where a non-national is authorized to dwell in the Sultanate, this law permits his/her spouse and children under the age of 21 also to dwell in the Sultanate. Section 22 of this law provides that a temporary travel document may be granted to the head of the household, his wife and dependants less than 18 years.

B. Present and future mechanisms and structures for coordinating and monitoring implementation of the Convention

1. National Plan of Action for Children

25. There is substantial evidence that during the last two decades, the Sultanate has vigorously pursued and implemented programmes to ensure child welfare, development and protection. The Sultanate demonstrates its national commitment to these programmes through its policies, official institutions, and contribution to international efforts such as the International Summit for Children in 1990. To address the most important emerging challenges, national programmes reinforce the Sultanate's commitment to consolidate and extend its earlier achievements.

26. With support from UNICEF, the National Plan has been created by four committees that addressed health, education, social affairs and disability issues. Committee representatives were drawn from government bodies, Sultan Qaboos University, non-governmental organizations and the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop a national action plan that identifies the Sultanate's most important challenges, obstacles and needs. The Committee further identified qualitative and quantitative targets and approved a series of practical strategies to implement these targets. It included provisions regarding woman and childcare in the National Plan. National programmes establish a long-term implementation plan with mid-term and long-term targets, programme criteria, monitoring systems and programme assessment.

27. With support and encouragement from related ministries and key institutions, the National Plan of Action for Woman and Childcare will play a central role in monitoring and reviewing targets and achievements as part of the ongoing development of the country.

2. National Committee for the Care of the Child

28. The National Committee for the Care of the Child (NCCC), established in October 1997 by Royal Decree No. 71/97, was authorized to conduct studies and research related to the child, build a related database, and propose programmes and projects designed to satisfy the physical, psychological and mental needs of the child. The NCCC was also asked to coordinate the activities of ministries and related institutions to establish and implement these projects and activities.

3. National Implementation and Follow-up Committee

29. After the Sultanate adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by Royal Decree No. 54/96, a national committee was established to follow up implementation of the Convention. The National Committee, with representatives from several ministries and related organizations, operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training.

30. The terms of reference and mandate of the Committee focus on two objectives:

(a) Publicizing the principles of the Convention through workshops to assist individuals responsible for child welfare policies and programmes;

(b) Ensuring the preparation of the Sultanate's initial report to fulfil article 44, paragraph 1, of the Convention and using the report as an occasion to (i) initiate a comprehensive national dialogue regarding the status of children in the Sultanate, and (ii) to develop the report to better secure the survival, development and protection of children living in the Sultanate.

4. Funding for programmes and services benefiting children

31. Children are undoubtedly the social stratum most benefiting from medical, social and educational programmes. For example, the budget of the Ministry of Education for 1998 was 14.7 per cent of the Sultanate's domestic national budget (excluding defence and national security). The funds for these programmes are allocated at national level of 66 per cent and regional level of 34 per cent. The national allocation includes all staff salaries, allowances and entitlements.

32. In 1997 the Ministry of Health (MoH) budget dropped to RO 127.3 million, 4 per cent less than the 1996 budget which was RO 133 million. (The decrease in the budget was part of nationwide cuts due to the falling prices of oil in international markets, which consequently had negative impacts on development programmes.) The development budget of MoH for 1997 dropped to RO 14.1 million, 30.02 per cent less than the 1996 budget. Recurrent expenditure

for 1997 totalled RO 113 2 million compared to RO 113 million in 1996, showing an increase of 0 2 per cent. The total ratio of MoH budget to government spending showed the following figures:

Recurrent expenditure	6 7 per cent
Development expenditure	5 4 per cent
Total expenditure	6 5 per cent

33. The total expenditure of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training for 1998, including childcare services and activities, rose to RO 43,757,000.

5. International and regional cooperation to develop policies and programmes for children

34. The Sultanate relies on national personnel and material resources to plan and implement programmes for children. At the same time, the Sultanate seeks new ways to cooperate with international organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and Arabic and Islamic institutions working on these and other related issues.

C. Measures adopted to implement the principles and provisions of the Convention

35. The National Committee for Follow-Up and Implementation of the Convention is increasing its efforts to publicize the Convention's principles and provisions and to coordinate the efforts of several ministries and institutions on these matters.

36. Since the Sultanate adopted the principles of the Convention, the Committee has intensified its activities by conducting information workshops for senior officials and working with government and non-government bodies concerned with childhood affairs. These workshops prepare senior officials and key staff to inform their institutions about the Committee's mandate and activities. Workshops organized with the cooperation and coordination of UNICEF were held on the following dates:

9-10 September 1997,
1-9 March 1998 (a series of workshops),
19-24 September 1998 (a series of workshops),
26-27 September 1998.

37. The workshops' basic objectives were: (i) to increase awareness about the Convention's provisions and principles, (ii) generate constructive proposals to improve the status of the child, and (iii) maintain consistency between the Sultanate's legislation and provisions of the Convention. These objectives were supplemented during the working sessions by reviewing the steps taken to prepare the Sultanate's initial report for submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Some methodological directives will be proposed with the objective of preparing the report later in order to give a positive and comprehensive picture of the present and

future measures intended to coordinate the law and national policies with the provisions of the Convention. Hereunder are more details about the objectives, organization methods and recommendations of the workshops.

1. Objectives

38. The objectives of the workshops were as follows:

(a) To develop awareness about the methods of preparing the Sultanate's initial report to the Committee, through the preparation and distribution to the concerned ministries and organizations of a questionnaire designed to reflect the general principles of the initial reports submitted to the Convention at its first session, convened on 15 October 1991;

(b) To emphasize the necessity for (i) initiating legislative, administrative and social plans, (ii) creating and approving the means to achieve these plans, and (iii) maximizing consistency between the Sultanate's legislation and national policy with the Convention's provisions. Workshop presentations gave an opportunity to analyse the practical steps that needed to be taken to achieve the Convention's provisions. The Committee reviewed research on programmes in progress and initiatives in various fields of children's rights;

(c) To stress the need for contributions by members of different communities, both public and private, in outlining and implementing policies and programmes concerning children and in the preparation of the initial report. This created an opportunity for a comprehensive national dialogue on the status of children, and on measures and mechanisms required to realize the various objectives of the Convention. Because children are physically and mentally vulnerable, they have an absolute right to protection and care provided by different parties, including the family and the State. The primary concern is for the child's right to survival, protection and development;

(d) To emphasize the need for appropriate and effective measures to publicize widely the principles and provisions of the Convention to adults and children in accordance with Article 42 of the Convention. On many occasions during the workshops' core sessions and group activities, several initiatives were proposed relating to the child's culture. We will present these proposals when the recommendations resulting from workshops become available;

(e) To provide detailed answers to specific questions raised by some concerned participants within their ministries during the preparation of their contribution to the initial report. Some matters relating to the participants' understanding of the questionnaire were clarified.

2. Organization of work of the workshops

39. The workshops held separate plenary sessions and working group discussions to permit presentations on the most important provisions of the Convention. The participants in the working groups dealt with one of the central themes by responding to questions formulated in advance by specialists. These questions and answers assisted in directing the work of the group members who, at the end of the workshops, prepared a draft position paper addressing two basic

points. Each group analysed the current situation of one of the central themes, emphasizing the important achievements arising from legislative measures and current systems and identifying obstacles and methods for overcoming them. Each group's working paper included several proposals and recommendations designed to remove obstacles and impediments and achieve progress in the different programmes available to children.

3. The most important recommendations emerging from workshops

40. Position papers (group analyses) demonstrated careful and consistent focus on the subjects. The papers were objective and frank.

41. The workshops issued several recommendations on subjects concerning: (i) the eradication of different forms of child neglect and abuse; (ii) the administration of juvenile justice; (iii) the right of the child to a sound education and a professionally administered school system; (iv) the right of the child to be provided with a healthy environment; and (v) the right to be protected against traditional practices injurious to health. We will present some of these views and recommendations in the relevant chapters of this report.

42. An integrated strategy has been agreed with regard to the general proposals emerging from these workshops. The strategy addresses possible future steps and plans to implement the provisions of the Convention into the Sultanate's legislation and national policies.

43. Workshop participants stressed the need to give special attention to the topics discussed at the workshops and to organize training of the persons responsible for activities and goals affecting the child. Special training courses are required for men and women selected from university graduates, interested university staff, and child affairs specialists from the public and private sectors. These courses will develop in trainees new capabilities and a clear understanding of the provisions of the Convention. These courses will assist trainees to supervise others, contribute effectively to initiating awareness about the Convention, and help those interested in children's affairs at the central and regional levels to find ways to implement the Convention's provisions.

44. It was proposed to prepare and publish special information bulletins to assist trainees to carry out their tasks in an effective manner. The Educational Media Department of the Ministry of Education intends, through programmes in school media, newspapers, radio and television, to implement an integrated plan to create awareness about the Convention's provisions and principles. This plan will include programmes, seminars and meetings for teachers and education staff on the provisions of the Convention. This will help them to initiate awareness among students, their families and guardians, and fathers' and mothers' councils through school activities such as broadcast and journalism activities.

II. DEFINITION OF THE CHILD

A. Relevant civil and personal law

45. The Omani Personal Law defines "child" in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and does not discriminate between males or females in any matter, including marriage.

1. Minimum age for acquiring full legal capacity

46. The Personal Law referred to above establishes the minimum age for acquiring full legal capacity as 18 years (sect. 139).

47. Section 145 of the Law enables a father to give his legal son an absolute or limited authority to administer his own property (or part of it) on reaching 15 years of age, with proof of good conduct. The father may withdraw or restrict such permission if he feels that this would be in his child's interest.

48. A child's custodian, subject to the approval of a judge, may permit a legal minor to administer his property, or part of it, upon reaching 15 years of age if the child's behaviour so warrants (sect. 146). The legal minor reaching 15 years of age and maintaining good behaviour may, if permission is withheld by his custodian, refer the matter to the judge (sect. 147). With proof of a minor's good conduct, a judge may award such a minor of 15 years of age or older the legal right to administer his own property (sect. 152). A minor with this permission has authority over his property (sect. 148), provided he periodically submits to the judge a report on his financial transactions (sect. 149). The judge and the custodian may cancel or restrict such permission if it is in the interest of the minor (sect. 150).

2. Minimum age for marriage

49. Among the provisions contained in the Personal Law is the stipulation, mentioned above, that the age of marriage shall not be less than 18 years (sect. 7) for both males and females. The judge may permit a marriage by a person under 18 with proof that this is in the minor's interest (sect. 10/C).

B. Education and the age of majority

50. The age of beginning primary education is 6 years and the age of completion is 12 years. It should be noted that promotion from the primary stage of education to the preparatory stage, the term of which is three years, only requires passing the primary education final year exams.

51. In section VII of this report we note that the Ministry of Education began in 1998/99 to implement the Basic Education system, which will take 10 years to implement fully. Most students will complete the Basic Education programme at the age of 16. This system provides education for all students for an uninterrupted period of 10 years, thus reducing the school dropout rate and increasing students' likelihood of completing the Basic Education programme.

C. Employment

52. Employment of children younger than 13 years is strictly prohibited. Moreover, children cannot be employed on night shifts (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.), in difficult or inappropriate work or required to work overtime, during weekends, or on holidays. Employment of minors in certain occupations is prohibited (chap. 6, Omani labour law issued by Royal Decree No. 34/73 as amended).

D. Age of civil and criminal accountability and for testifying in civil and criminal courts

1. Minimum age for imposing a prison sentence on a child

53. Criminal responsibility begins at the age of nine years (sect. 104, Omani Penal Law), but a minor between 9 and 13 years of age may not be deprived of his freedom and may only be kept in a penitentiary designated by the judge up to his eighteenth birthday. Judges have the discretion to sentence a minor to a penitentiary (sect. 105).

54. The judge may reprimand a minor appearing before him and then place him in the custody of his guardian. This requires that the custodian sign an undertaking to raise the minor and prevent him from committing another crime within the period specified in the judgement. The guardian, in default of this undertaking, is subject to penalties as described in the section relevant to the guardian's neglect of minors.

55. Persons having reached 13 years of age but who are less than 15 who commit a crime punishable by death or life imprisonment shall be punished by imprisonment for 3-5 years, and for 1-3 years for other crimes. For misdemeanours, the person shall be imprisoned from 10 days to a maximum of 6 months (sect. 106). Persons having reached 15 years of age but who are less than 18 shall be punished by imprisonment of 5-10 years for a crime punishable by death or life imprisonment and from 3-7 years for other crimes; the sentence for misdemeanours shall be imprisonment from 10 days to a maximum of 1 year (sect. 107).

2. Minimum age for imposing a death sentence or life imprisonment on children

56. In the light of the two provisions referred to above, no sentence of death or life imprisonment shall be pronounced on a person who has not reached 18 years.

3. Minimum age for testifying in criminal and civil courts

57. The minimum age for testifying in criminal and civil courts is 18 years, for both males and females. There are no legal provisions fixing the age for giving testimony in civil law. Other laws that disqualify a person under 15 from testifying are applicable after the court assesses the capacity of the minor to understand the questions directed to him and his/her ability to answer them reasonably.

III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

A. Non-discrimination (art. 2)

58. The Basic Law of the Sultanate guarantees rights and freedoms without discrimination, as referred to in article 2. Under the Basic Law, children must receive care and protection from adults. The laws and regulations do not permit different medical, social, educational, or cultural services on the basis of gender, domicile, social or national origin, first language, colour, or any other similar considerations, as stipulated by the provisions of article 17 of the Convention.

1. Removal of disparities between males and females

59. There shall be no discrimination between males and females in their access to education. Schools are open for every child, male or female, who reaches the legal age of six which qualifies the child to begin primary education. No discrimination is permitted between children of either gender for medical or social services. No discrimination is permitted regarding the legal age for marriage or any other legal matters.

2. Measures for minimizing economic, social and geographical disparities, including rural/urban disparities

60. The Sultanate has taken several measures to minimize disparities for the delivery of services. There are no educational or health inequities because health, social and educational services, including textbooks and school transportation, are available throughout the Sultanate without cost to all children.

61. Measures have been taken to minimize disparities between rural and urban areas. Examples include schools opened throughout the Sultanate, chartered vehicles for students' transport, hostels for male and female students when needed, constructing hospitals, and availability of other social services in all regions. (Please see the data and information in sections VI and VII).

B. Best interests of the child (art. 3)

62. "The best interests of the child" is the fundamental principle underlying policies and programmes in health, social services and education. The Personal Law specifies the basis of the family, the relationship between spouses, and their duties to their children. The child's best interest is considered to be the basis for adult responsibilities and related legal measures.

63. When spouses separate, courts give great attention to the children's best interests, especially in issues of custody, care, visitation rights and child support. The best interests of the child have their parallel in the criteria applied for the delivery of medical, social and educational services. The Sultanate seeks to improve all these services as it has done by introducing the Basic Education system in 1998/99.

64. To ensure that the child's best interests are served, the Sultanate is endeavouring to incorporate further guarantees into the juvenile justice system. The draft law applying to

juveniles and establishing special juvenile courts, penitentiaries, and other legal and social systems will ensure that minors are treated properly in the light of their age, that the dignity of individual children is protected, and that there are methods to reform and rehabilitate them to community life.

65. Many officials, organizations and agencies periodically review their programmes in order to introduce new methods to meet the needs and developing capabilities of the child. This was clearly shown during the workshops relating to the Convention referred to in section I above. These workshops produced important proposals covering different aspects concerning the child. These proposals will be dealt with in the following chapters of this report under the headings health, education, administration of juvenile justice and protection of children against different forms of abuse and exploitation.

C. Right to life, survival and development (art. 6)

66. Both the law and national policy guarantee the right of the child to life, survival and development through a variety of measures.

1. Establishing an environment which ensures the child's right to life and development

67. The health policy followed by the Sultanate (see sect. VI) achieved important results in reducing infant mortality of children under five years, improving access to basic health services for the mother and child, extending immunization programmes, promoting balanced nutrition, and establishing safe environments with good living conditions. Omani law has identified the appropriate mechanisms to secure the right of the child to survival and protection against all dangers. Section 214 of the Omani Penal Law punishes, with a prison term of 6 months to a maximum of 3 years and a fine of RO 10-500, any person who abducts or deports a minor under 18 years of age, thereby separating him /her from the authority of the guardian or custodian. The penalty is levied whether or not the minor consented. If a minor under 13 years is abducted or deported by coercion or seduction, the offender will be punished with imprisonment from 3 to 15 years. The Omani Penal Law (sect. 217) also provides for a punishment of imprisonment of 3 months to 1 year for any person who abandons or deserts a child under 7 years of age or a person incapable of protecting himself by reason of a physical or psychological condition, forcing him/her into beggary. If the child is abandoned or discarded in a deserted place, punishment will be for 1-3 years and will be multiplied if the offender is a relative or legal guardian of the victim. The offender will be punished with imprisonment for at least 5 years if the victim was gravely injured and for 10-15 years should the child die.

2. Measures taken to secure registration of child mortality

68. Ministry of Health Decision No. 3/80 issued on 5 March 1980 concerning reporting of births, deaths and contagious diseases provides that all persons resident in the Sultanate are legally obligated to report a birth during the week following the birth and to report deaths and suspected contagious diseases to the Contagious Diseases Section or the nearest hospital or any of the Ministry of Health units within 24 hours, at the most, of the date of their occurrence.

3. Measures taken to prevent suicide of children and ensuring their survival

69. Section 241 of the Omani Penal Law provides that whoever instigates a person to commit suicide or assists him/her to kill himself/herself shall be punished with imprisonment for a maximum of 10 years. In the case of an unsuccessful suicide attempt, the punishment is reduced to a minimum term of 3 months to a maximum of 2 years. The second paragraph of this section adds further that if the person who instigated or assisted to commit suicide was a juvenile under 15 years of age or mentally incapable, heavier penalties shall be applied. Section 239 of the same law, securing the child's right to survival, provides that a mother who attempts to kill her illegitimate child shall be punished with 5 years' imprisonment.

70. Similarly, whoever purports, by whatever means, to cause a woman to abort with her consent shall be punished with imprisonment of 6 months to 3 years. An exception is made where an obstetrician genuinely believes that an abortion was the only way to save the life of the mother (sect. 234).

71. Section 244 provides that any woman who by the use of any means, by herself or, with her consent, with the help of another, causes herself to abort, shall be punished with imprisonment of 3 months to 3 years.

D. Respect for the views of the child (art. 12)

72. Officials have introduced measures to promote and foster the family by assisting parents to perform their duties to provide for their children's needs. Health, social care and education officials conduct programmes through different media to enlighten parents on the need for them to make a success of the programmes and services directed to children.

73. The principle of respecting the child's views is shown in the procedures for school administration. Details on this matter are provided in section VII.B of this report. Students may choose an academic specialization after the end of the first year of secondary school. Students also have the opportunity to participate in the school administration through class boards and school activities.

IV. RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

A. Name and nationality (art. 7)

1. Registration of births

74. The Ministry of Health is responsible for registering births and issuing birth certificates in accordance with Ministerial Decision No. 3/80, mentioned earlier.

2. The child's identity and measures taken to secure his right to identify the parents

75. Section 18 of the Civil Status Law Bill provides that the report of birth shall include: the day, date, hour and place of birth; the gender and name of the child; the names of the parents, tribe, nationality, religion, parents' place of residence and occupation. In case of a multiple birth a separate report shall be made for each infant.

76. The Ministry of Health is currently taking the necessary steps to ensure that the identity of children in hospitals and maternity centres is always carefully managed.

3. Measures taken to secure the child's right to a nationality and the criteria for establishing nationality

77. The Sultanate of Oman protects the child's right to have a nationality (sect. 1 of Royal Decree No. 3/83, as amended). The Omani Nationality Law defines an Omani national as a person born:

In Oman, or outside it if the father is Omani;

In Oman, or outside it if the mother is Omani and the father is unknown, paternity has not been legally proved, or the Omani father has lost his nationality;

In Oman of unknown parents;

In Oman, the family's usual place of residence, to a father born in Oman but who at the time of the birth had lost his nationality.

B. Preservation of identity (art. 8)

78. Decision No. 96/88 of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training on the promulgation of the Organizational Charter of Children in Need of Care was issued on 22 November 1980. Article 2 of the decision provides that any person who finds a newly born baby of unknown parents should hand the baby over to the nearest hospital, medical centre, police station or the District Wali. The responsible office(r) should receive the baby, compile a report stating the conditions, place, date and time of the incident and the name, profession and address of the person who found it, unless such person declines to disclose his identity. Article 3 of the decision provides that the Ministry of Health unit concerned should conduct a medical check-up of the baby immediately and take adequate measures to ensure the baby's health and protection. The baby's age should be assessed by an authorized medical officer at the institution concerned.

C. Freedom of expression (art. 13)

1. The right of the child to request and receive information and ideas and to participate in their propagation

79. The Omani child has the opportunity to acquire various kinds of information and ideas through school, magazines, newspapers, television and radio. Satellite channels have become an important source of information. Children may receive the same information from the media, international or local, as adults. The Omani media are committed to the cultural heritage and traditions of the country but are open to a variety of international cultures. This openness extends to scientific, social and health programmes. The media avoid exposing children to negative and injurious materials found in some programmes and printed material.

80. The education system strengthens and develops the Sultanate's culture, beliefs, traditions, and practices while remaining open to knowledge and information about scientific, cultural and technical matters that promote human welfare and are compatible with the Sultanate's cultural identity, national traditions and practices.

2. Measures taken to enable children at different stages of education to express their views within the school environment

81. Section VII.B of this report highlights the approved educational curriculum which enables students at different stages to express their views and contribute effectively to cultural and educational clubs in schools. This expression is to take place in a manner conducive to advancing children's competencies, i.e. by demonstrating positive behaviour, presenting practical projects, and participating in competitions and debates.

3. Restrictions governing children's right of expression within and outside educational institutions

82. The sole restriction governing the exercise by children of the right of expression within and outside educational institutions is that such exercise shall not exceed the limits of religious convictions or socially accepted behaviour.

D. Accessibility of appropriate information (art. 17)

1. Availability of school materials and books for children enabling them to acquire information of social and cultural benefit

83. Planning and development of curricula, textbooks and activities must converge with the aims and objectives of developing school materials appropriate to the age of the child. Accordingly, activity books for children have been prepared in subjects such as mathematics and sciences. Primary school libraries contain a wide variety of children's booklets and exciting storybooks, including books about discoveries in science.

84. Each year the Ministry adds to the resources of these libraries. Educational software on various subjects is currently being prepared and will be made available in the Learning Resource Centres at the Basic Education-level schools.

2. International cooperation programmes for the production and exchange of socially and culturally acceptable information and materials

85. The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Education, is a member of key international, Arab and Gulf organizations including UNESCO, UNICEF, Islamic Conference Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ALECSO) and the Arab Gulf States Bureau of Education. To maximize the benefit of this membership through the prosecution and exchange of information and material, the Ministry of Education has established the Department of International Relations. This department is responsible for the development and exchange of booklets and press releases and for organizing workshops, symposia and conferences on the objectives of article 17 of the Convention.

86. There is close cooperation between the Ministry and UNICEF, which provides unique services for children by making available materials and services that benefit children.

87. The Ministry supports school libraries by providing them with international and local booklets and leaflets that benefit children socially and culturally. The Ministry of Education and other organizations regularly exchange educational documentary programmes and materials addressing children's rights.

E. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art. 14)

88. Subject to the reservation made by the Sultanate of Oman in respect of article 14, foreign community schools are permitted to offer education to non-national children. The said reservation provides that, "States parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion".

89. There are a small number of non-Muslim students in government schools. They are exempt from attending Islamic education lessons and from the graduation requirements involving Islamic education.

F. Freedom of association and peaceful assembly (art. 15)

90. The Basic Law of the State (sects. 32 and 33) guarantees the right of citizens to meet together within the limits of the law and to form associations on national bases for legitimate and peaceful purposes that do not contradict the provisions and objectives of the Basic Law. This freedom is guaranteed under the terms and conditions stipulated in the Basic Law. Associations with activities hostile to society and its good order or that are clandestine or military are strictly forbidden. No national or non-national may be compelled to join any association.

91. Omani legislation allows the imposition of some restrictions in order to preserve public order and public health. Article 40 of the Basic Law provides that it is the duty of all residents of the Sultanate to have respect for the laws and regulations issued by public authorities and to abide by public order and morality.

92. Article 11 of the Police Law (Royal Decree No. 35/90) provides that the Royal Oman Police are responsible for the preservation of public order, security and morality and the protection of persons, their property, honour and safety.

93. Section 134 of the Penal Law restricts the forming of associations, parties, or organizations with objectives hostile to the basic political and economic system of the Sultanate.

94. Section 137 of the Penal Law penalizes with a sentence of 10 days to 1 year, or a fine not exceeding RO 50, anyone who joins an organized gathering of at least 10 persons with the intention of rioting or disturbing the public peace.

G. Protection of personal privacy (art. 16)

95. The Basic Law protects personal privacy and includes the following provisions:

Section 18 - Personal freedom is guaranteed according to law. Persons may not be arrested, searched, detained, confined to their homes or have their freedom of movement restricted.

Section 26 - No medical or practical experiment may be conducted on a person without his freely given consent.

Section 27 - Houses are inviolable and may not be entered without the permission of their owners except in cases specified by law and under specific regulations.

Section 30 - Freedom of post, telegrams, telephone calls and other means of communication is guaranteed. These communications are confidential and may not be tapped, disclosed, delayed, or confiscated except in cases stated by law and subject to prescribed procedures.

96. Section 312 of the Penal Law penalizes through imprisonment, a fine of RO 1-5 or both for these offences:

(a) Disturbing the public peace by causing clamour in public or private places;

(b) Indecent appearance in public places.

97. Sections 256, 262 and 269 of the same law protect the privacy of life and specify measures against and penalties for violators.

V. THE FAMILY AND ALTERNATIVE CHILD CARE

A. Parental guidance (art. 5)

98. In addition to the data provided in earlier chapters of this report, it should be observed that the Personal Law (sect. 36/5) has provided for the care and sound education of children. Sections 125 and 126 provide for the custodianship of children and section 133 provides that the parent or custodian is legally accountable for the care, education and guidance of the child. The Personal Law provides the procedures preceding marriage (i.e. engagement) and explains the goals of marriage, its conditions and procedures. It also defines the legal conditions to be satisfied by engaged couples and specifies the individuals who may not marry. The rights of the spouses are also protected in section 3 of the Personal Law, including the important provisions of good companionship, reciprocal respect, preservation of the family's welfare, care and upbringing of children, and respect for the elders of each spouse's family. The law details the separate rights each spouse holds.

99. The Personal Law states the rules, conditions and entitlement of children for financial support. It requires that the father provide a home for his family and that he voluntarily care for his family, and establishes penalties for failure to fulfil these duties.

100. The Personal Law identifies the person responsible for child support and includes rules for the separation of the spouses, the consequences of separation and the rules of custody. It has provisions relating to the financial affairs of the minor, imposes on the father the duty to care and maintain his child's property, and establishes penalties for the negligence of the father or others in protecting the minor's interests.

B. Responsibility of the parents (art. 18)

101. Section 130 of the Personal Law makes custody a parental duty as long as the marriage exists and determines guardianship in case of separation. The Law considers marriage as a partnership in which the responsibilities are divided between the spouses with each having a duty towards the other. Spouses have a joint duty and responsibility to establish a stable family, ensuring that their children are prepared for future responsibility within the society.

C. Separation from the parents (art. 9)

102. Children shall not be separated from their parents except in situations specified by the law and that protect the child's best interests. Even in case of divorce the law regulates parental visitation rights, custody of the children, and safeguarding their care. In case of disagreement a court may settle the dispute according to section 125 of the Personal Law.

103. The Personal Law does not permit children to be separated from their parents, but when parents are separated the Law regulates the rights of custody and visitation. In case of a dispute over custody, children at an age when they can freely make a choice will be consulted and their desires will be respected. Minors who depend solely on their mother will never be separated from her.

104. The essence of custody is the right of the child to maintain constructive relations with his divorced parents. In case of disagreement between divorced spouses, the court will intervene to regulate visitation on a basis that preserves the relationship between the child and the parents in a manner that sustains psychological stability, growth and development to become a constructive member of family and country.

D. Family reunification (art. 10)

105. Subject to the data included in section I.A of the report on the travel of non-nationals with their children, section 14 of the Foreigners' Sojourn Law provides for automatic residency for the spouse and sons under 21 years of age of a foreigner, provided they do not have resident permits of their own.

E. The child's financial security (art. 27, para. 4)

106. The non-registration of a baby has no effect on the requirement of child support since proof of fatherhood through legitimate means is sufficient for establishing the child's right to support from the person responsible for the support. Sections 60, 61, 62 and 69 of the Personal Law provide for the adoption of orphans and children of unknown fathers so that affairs can be administered and their rights secured.

107. According to the Social Security Law issued by Royal Decree No. 87/84, an orphan, male or female, less than 18 years of age, whether the parents are deceased or unknown, is entitled to a monthly payment from the State. This insurance provides coverage to a girl over 18 years who lacks a person responsible for her support as well as to a boy over 18 years who is enrolled at school and completing his secondary school education (or its equivalent).

108. Children of separated parents or children whose father refuses to provide child support (Royal Decree No. 115/94) may ask the court to remit the amount from the parent's wages. The court may direct the employer to send these funds directly to the court for the benefit of the child.

F. Children without families (art. 2)

109. Ministerial Decision No. 96/88, based on the provisions of Royal Decree No. 85/92, establishes the National Committee for the Care of Children. Paragraph C of section 1 of the ministerial decision identifies children in need of care and defines an alternative family. Section 6 describes the conditions under which an alternative family is eligible for financial support for the child in order to ensure a stable family atmosphere suitable for his upbringing and moral development.

110. After assigning a child to an alternative family, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, and Vocational Training makes frequent site visits to ensure that the alternative family actually carries out its obligations towards the child.

111. Sponsorship of orphans under Islamic Sharia is a charitable activity based on voluntary acts of religious conviction as found in Islam. In the absence of an alternative family or other guardian, the State assumes responsibility for the orphan's affairs and good citizenship. Within this context, the State has issued a number of laws including Security Law No. 87/84 and the Retirement and Special Insurance and the Alms [Zakat] Fund, both of which secure the right of orphans to decent living.

112. The Child Care Home was set up under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, and Vocational Training to provide homes for children in need of such care. The most important objective of the Home is to provide comprehensive child care which includes:

General living conditions and services required by the child;

Adequate health care, meals, and cleanliness;

Care which meets their psychological needs;

Social and educational care and appropriate upbringing;

Educational opportunities;

Recreational activities.

VI. BASIC HEALTH CARE

A. General information

113. Article 12 of the Basic Law of the State has identified the family as the core of society, regulating its protection, preserving its legal integrity, fostering its ties and values, recognizing its constituents, and creating conditions convenient to the promotion of their talents and abilities. Article 12 of the Basic Law emphasizes the State's concern for public health, disease prevention and medical care for all its citizens. The Law encourages the establishment of hospitals and clinics according to the rules prescribed and under government supervision.

114. Child care services are available in most hospitals and clinics in the country. Full treatment services and advanced technological facilities are provided in these health care institutions. The following table shows the medical institutions of the Ministry of Health as of 1997:

Table 1

Ministry of Health, medical facilities, 1997

Facilities	No.
General hospitals	47
Beds	4 374
Patients/bed	516
Beds/1,000 patients	1.9
Polyclinics	6
Clinics with beds	57
Clinics without beds	51

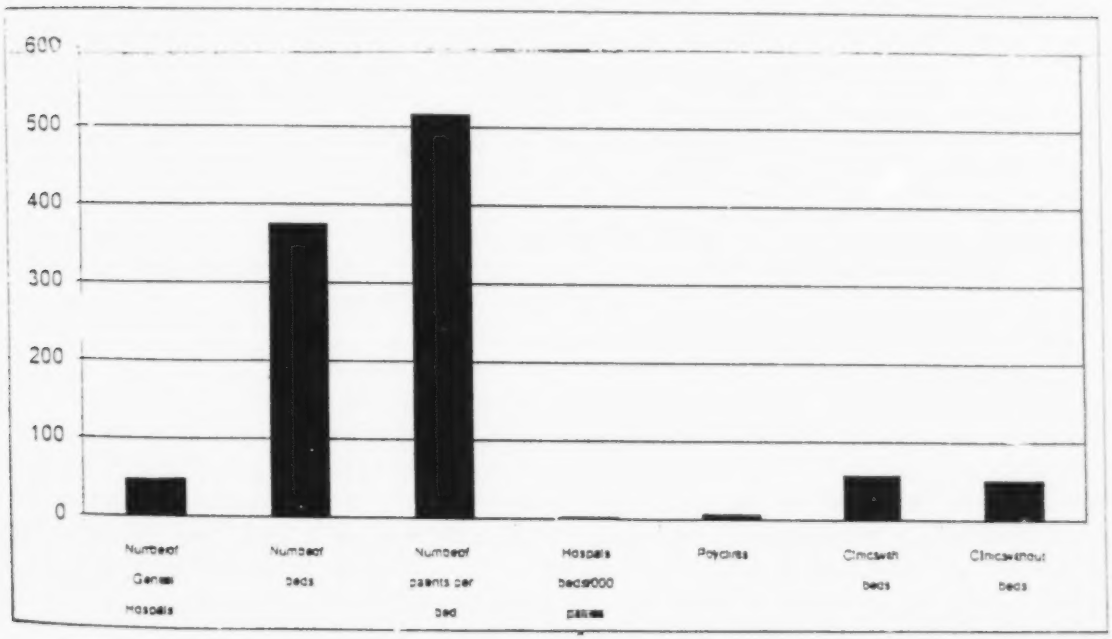


Figure 1

Ministry of Health medical facilities, 1997

115. The Sultanate ranks high among nations in regard to the reduction of child and infant mortality. During the period 1980-1991, according to United Nations statistics the Sultanate achieved an annual reduction of 10 per cent in the under-5 mortality rate, causing the Sultanate to be ranked number one among Middle Eastern and African States and number two worldwide (after Colombia).

116. According to Ministry of Health reports, the mortality rate of children under 1 was 18/1,000 live births in 1997 compared with 20/1,000 in 1995, 29/1,000 in 1990, 24/1,000 in 1980 and 181/1,000 in 1970. The under-5 mortality rate was 29/1,000 in 1996 compared with 118/1,000 in 1970.

117. The rapid reduction in child and infant mortality is attributed to the availability and accessibility of medical services, the enhancement of cultural, educational and health information for Omani mothers. This is in addition to the success achieved by the national immunization programme, the use of solutions to combat dehydration, and accelerated social development. The Ministry of Health is developing a draft law on birth and child mortality that will be implemented in the near future by the Ministry.

B. Development of preventive medicine, basic health care and health education

1. Public health care

118. The Ministry of Health provides basic health care to children from birth up to 6 years including:

(a) Comprehensive care to underweight and premature infants;

(b) Assessment of mental and physical development to identify early any retardation and the means to treat it;

(c) Early diagnosis of epidemics among children;

(d) Improved care for handicapped and disabled children;

(e) Provision of medical services for pre-school children.

2. Health care for schoolchildren

119. School health services in the Sultanate have witnessed rapid development since the school health programme was launched in 1995. These services are administered under the School Health Department of the Ministry of Health. At the start of the fifth five-year plan (1996-2000), school health activities include a variety of basic health care services including:

(a) Comprehensive medical check-up of male and female pupils entering primary, preparatory and secondary schools. In 1997, 45,838 primary and 45,702 intermediate and secondary school students were medically checked; this represents over 99 per cent of all schoolchildren. Every student has a personal medical record containing his/her illness and treatment history and current status;

(b) Eyesight, strabismus, and trachoma examinations for entering primary, preparatory, and secondary school students;

(c) Hearing examinations for entering primary school pupils,

(d) Immunization of grade one and grade six pupils and of secondary year two students, with 100 per cent coverage;

(e) Treatment of minor ailments and provision of first aid;

(f) Follow-up of acute cases and referral of pupils to physicians where the case so requires.

3. Student health education

120. The School Health Department, Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the concerned agencies, publicizes educational materials with health information tailored to different age groups.

121. In 1996, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Ministry of Health published the Omani version of Facts for Life for distribution to all secondary school second year students. School health specialists provide additional information and explanations about the health issues addressed therein.

4. School health environment

122. The functions of school health teams include ensuring the availability and purity of drinking water, the cleanliness of school premises, including sanitary bathrooms, the serving of wholesome food in school canteens, proper disposal of waste and vermin-free facilities.

5. Dental and oral health

123. The dental and oral health section examines class one primary pupils and provides preventive and curative services to them. It also provides dental and oral health guidance to other primary classes. During the school year 1996/97 the total number of pupils provided this service was approximately 27,500, which is 56 per cent of the total number of class one primary school pupils (48,980); 16,920 pupils were checked, which was 61.5 per cent of the total number of the target pupil population.

C. Extended immunization programme

124. This programme is striving to realize and maintain high immunization coverage and reduction in the incidence of diseases. During 1996, the coverage was 99 per cent nationwide. The programme includes immunization against infantile paralysis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis, measles, and epidemic hepatitis. In 1997 immunization against parotid gland infection has been added to the list of immunizations.

125. There is a strict monitoring programme for diseases targeted by the extended immunization programme, which includes monitoring acute palsy as part of the elimination of infantile aralysis. During 1997 no case of infantile paralysis was reported in the Sultanate. Eight cases of acute palsy were reported and classified as non-infantile paralysis following a careful etiological analysis. No cases of tetanus in newborn babies was reported during 1997. This disease will be eradicated in the Sultanate soon since its rate of incidence is less than 1/1,000 in every district in the country.

126. No diphtheria cases occurred during 1997 and measles decreased to 12 verified cases (39 cases reported). Whooping cough incidences decreased to 73 reported cases.

127. In November 1996 a national immunization campaign was organized, followed by a second campaign in December 1996. The first campaign covered 92.5 per cent of the school age population. The organization of this campaign is part of the common efforts of the Gulf countries to eradicate childhood diseases. Following the success of the 1996 campaigns, a similar programme was implemented during 1997.

D. Disabled children

128. The protection of children against disability includes:

(a) Medical treatment and social rehabilitation;

(b) Ensuring their right to education and training;

(c) An integrated campaign supported by government agencies.

1. Prevention of disability

129. The Ministry of Health cooperates with other concerned agencies to reduce the number of accidents causing disability and ensures that services are provided to disabled children. These MoH initiatives include preventive and curative services.

130. In the field of preventive medicine, the Ministry of Health exerts extensive efforts to eradicate infantile paralysis, which causes disability to infected children. Through the extended immunization programme, the Ministry provides vaccinations to children against this disease. The Sultanate is regarded as one of the pioneer countries in eradication of this disease and had a vaccination rate of 996/1,000 in 1996. In cooperation with other concerned authorities, the Ministry is launching information campaigns to reduce disabilities resulting from accidents.

2. Medical and social rehabilitation of disabled children

131. The Ministry of Health secures, depending on the availability of resources, a variety of services for disabled children. These services include physiotherapy centres at Khoula hospital in Muscat, Qaboos hospital in Salalah, Nizwa hospital, and Buraimi hospital. Khoula hospital provides medical services for the treatment of spinal cord injuries, apoplexy, work-related injuries, speech therapy, orthopaedics, and prosthetic devices (artificial limbs). Khoula hospital is considered the principal centre for the local manufacture of artificial limbs. Eleven centres provide care and rehabilitation services to disabled individuals and are located throughout the Sultanate; these do not include the four centres which are supervised by the Association for the Welfare of Handicapped Children. These community-based centres are managed by local committees in the districts and supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training. They provide services for children with different disabilities in the age

group 4-14 in the areas of care, education and development of life skills. In cooperation with other concerned authorities, the Ministry of Health provides training to staff working with the disabled in the rehabilitation centres.

132. The Training and Information Department of the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, and Vocational Training and other concerned bodies, strives to increase the level of information available to citizens. This includes information on the prevention and causes of disability, the challenges faced by the disabled, how to address their daily requirements, and the methods for assisting disabled children to develop their abilities.

133. The Ministry of Health, through the School Health Programme and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, provides health care at the Al-Amal School for the Deaf and Mute. Oral hygiene and dental care programmes for children are offered through mobile units.

134. To integrate the efforts of different bodies and to coordinate them, a national committee for the care of the disabled has been constituted under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, and Vocational Training and other concerned sectors. The scope of work of the Committee includes:

- Coordinating plans and programmes concerned with the prevention of disabilities in children in a manner that facilitates early diagnosis and treatment;

- Developing programmes for training and retraining of disabled children and facilitating their integration into the community, with the aim of providing them with the opportunity to participate fully in life with their peers.

3. Assuring the right of the disabled child to education and training

135. In order to secure the right of the disabled child to education and training, the following institutions currently offer services.

136. The Care and Rehabilitation Centre at Al-Khoud, accommodating 156 disabled children in 1998, is administered under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training. It offers services to children with severe disabilities in the 3-14 age group. These services tend, through physiotherapy programmes, to achieve a certain level of rehabilitation which assists the disabled child to acquire self-reliance. The Centre offers its services to deaf and mute children and others with simple disabilities within the context of their training and rehabilitation to refit into society. Vocational training offered to these disabled children includes carpentry, printing, smithery, domestic crafts, tailoring and computer literacy.

137. The disabled child care centres in 11 district centres provide services to 449 children with 146 voluntary social workers, as shown in the following table:

Table 2

Disabled child care centres in 11 districts

Location	Children	Voluntary workers
Nizwa	74	16
Al Rustaq	55	18
Ibri	56	15
Al Buraimi	36	11
Sohar	33	10
Ibra	41	14
Sur	57	21
Bidbid	63	17
Taqa	9	3
Mirbat	9	5
Salalah	66	16
Total	499	146

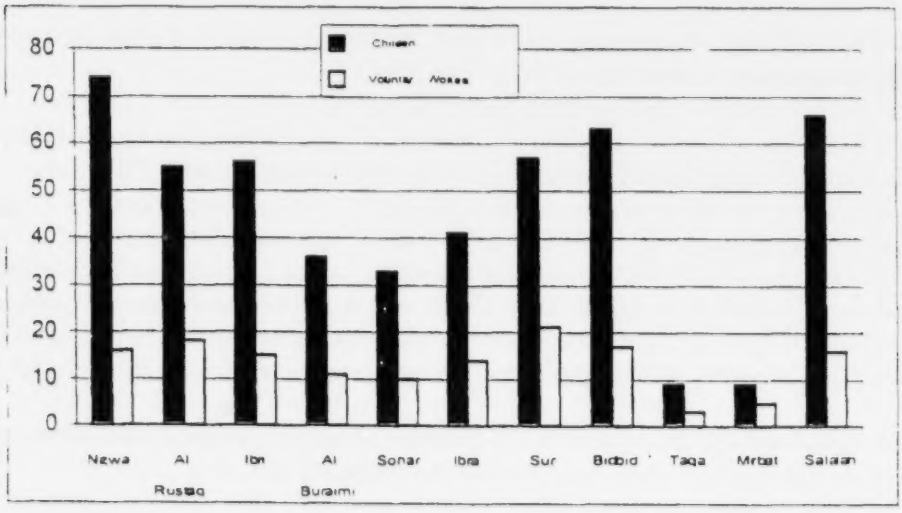


Figure 2

Disabled child care centres in 11 Districts

Table 3

Disabled child care centres of The Association for the Welfare of Handicapped Children

Year	Muscat	Qurayat	Seeb	Ja'alan	Total
1991/92	10	12	-	-	22
1992/93	12	28	-	-	40
1993/94	15	26	-	-	41
1994/95	38	31	-	-	69
1995/96	38	45	-	-	83
1996/97	42	58	50	-	100
1997/98	51	28	47	27	153
1998/99	50	31	66	28	175

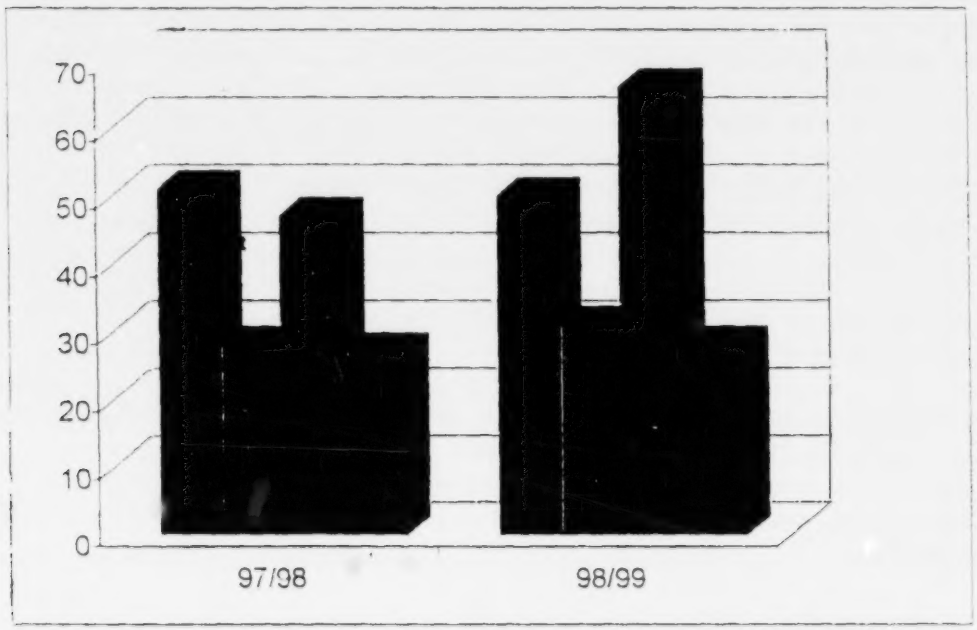


Figure 3

Disabled children care centres of The Association for the Welfare of Handicapped Children

138. Under a recent programme, disabled children attend classes with other children in educational institutions. These students who are physically disabled or blind, have been enrolled by the Ministry of Education in schools together with healthy children at all levels.

E. Mother and child health care

139. Recognizing the desire of mothers to breastfeed their infants, the Labour Law provides for 40 days paid maternity leave.

140. In 1992, in cooperation with UNICEF, the "baby-friendly hospital" initiative was launched in the Sultanate. All 51 medical institutions in the Sultanate declared themselves "baby-friendly hospitals" in December 1994. This renders Oman the second country in the Middle East to achieve this. All these hospitals have implemented the 10 requisites for a successful natural breastfeeding by strictly prohibiting the promotion and free distribution of milk-substitute samples. A draft law for substitute mother's milk is now under review. The Sultanate has taken measures to guarantee the uniform application of the 10 steps required for hospitals to maintain their status as "baby-friendly hospitals". These measures reflect recommendations adopted by UNICEF and WHO.

141. Within the scope of this initiative, Community Health Support Groups have been formed inside hospitals. These groups visit pregnant and breastfeeding women in hospitals, clinics and the mothers' residence. Initiating breastfeeding of babies during the first half-hour after birth and continuing for four months constitutes the principal task.

142. The work of these groups has been extended to enable them to play a greater role in society. They now advise and provide information in all health-related matters, including observing the child's growth, weight and progress, intervals between pregnancies, and prevention of diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections.

143. The rate of underweight newborn babies (less than 2,500 g) has dropped to 82/1,000 in 1997 from 87/1,000 in 1990. The miscarriage rate has dropped to 13/1,000 in 1997 from to 13.3/1,000 in 1990 and 16.6/1,000 in 1980.

144. A considerable improvement has occurred in nutrition of newborn babies during the last decade but malnutrition, particularly in the early years, remains a concern. The Child Development System implemented by health institutions in the Sultanate provides better opportunities for early diagnosis of malnutrition among children and early intervention to change the child's nutrition.

145. According to the Ministry of Health 61/1,000 children under 5 years of age suffer from some degree of malnutrition (usually protein deficiency), of which 3 per cent are serious cases of malnutrition, 21.9 per cent moderate and 75.1 per cent simple cases. The rate of malnutrition amounts to 127/1,000 in the interior area, 67/1,000 in the Al Wosta area, and 16/1,000 in Dhofar. There have been only four reported cases of mortality of children under 5 years of age due to malnutrition.

146. In 1994 a pioneering experiment began in Oman to resolve the problem of malnutrition among children under 3 years of age, applying the "Triple A Nutrition Initiative" developed by UNICEF, where female volunteers work in their communities to monitor the weight gain and growth of children in their homes. Beginning in just one community, these programmes have been implemented in six of the Sultanate's 10 areas. The evaluation of this experiment is promising, as it has reduced the level of malnutrition among children by 23 per cent.

147. The efforts of the Ministry of Health to eradicate diarrhoea within the fourth five-year plan (1991-1995) resulted in a remarkable decrease in patients and fatalities. In 1997, 109,963 cases of diarrhoea were reported compared to 132,413 cases in 1996. This represents a reduction in the rate of infection among children less than 5 years from 481/1,000 in 1996 to 399/1,000 in 1997. Cases accompanied by simple and moderate dehydration represented 9.4 per cent of the total and 0.2 per cent severe dehydration. Only two deaths due to diarrhoea were reported during 1997.

148. The Gulf Family Health Survey done in 1995 revealed that 88 per cent of children suffering from diarrhoea were treated by increasing the quantity of fortified liquids and 83 per cent with simple rehydration solutions. The target of eliminating diarrhoea by the year 2000 is well under way.

149. In 1997 attention has been devoted to acute and epidemic respiratory diseases among children under 5 years of age. This is a health problem with a high priority in the fifth five-year plan (1996-2000) and is part of a broader plan to eradicate epidemics. The aggregate infection from these diseases was 584,627 cases in 1997, a reduction of 60,885 cases from 1996, representing a decrease of 2.1/1,000.

150. Basic health-care services for mothers and children are provided by all basic health-care centres in the Sultanate including clinics and hospitals established in each williat. These centres provide basic health-care services and in some instances second- and third-degree care. These services include:

(a) Prenatal services:

- Early diagnosis of pregnancy;
- Regular care during pregnancy;
- Ensuring safe pregnancy and nutrition for the mother;
- Diagnosis of women with difficult pregnancies and provision of special care to them including home visits;
- Provision of basic laboratory tests in all primary health-care centres;
- Immunization of pregnant women against tetanus in accordance with their previous level of immunization in the national immunization programme;

(b) Delivery of services:

- Extension of delivery of services making them available to the community;
- Encouraging women to give birth in the nearest health institution and referring critical cases to specialized centres;
- Training of traditional and legal midwives for home deliveries in remote areas;

(c) Post-natal services:

- Ensuring medical examination of babies immediately at birth;
- Post-delivery health care to mothers in hospitals;
- Health care to mothers during recovery;
- Post-delivery care to women delivering at home.

151. Health education is a high priority for the Ministry of Health in the Sultanate. The most important of these issues are those related to the health of the mother and child. Services are organized in most residential areas with special attention paid to serving remote communities. Among the objectives of these services is providing basic information to parents regarding their health and nutrition. This objective is considered to be the most fundamental. An important milestone was reached with the publication in 1996 of the Omani version of the Facts for Life book that has 17 chapters addressing topics of vital importance to the child and for community health. Four new chapters have been inserted into the new 1998 edition, including a chapter on child growth, immunization, diarrhoea, genetically based disability, adolescent health, public health, environmental and life patterns, intervals between pregnancies, and raising children in a family setting, and a chapter on health services in the Sultanate.

152. During 1997 several publications, pamphlets and posters were designed and distributed throughout the Sultanate. These materials covered many topics related to the health of the mother and child such as: protection against infantile paralysis and AIDS, hygiene, environmental protection, birth spacing, smoking, marriage between relatives, accidents, nutrition and foods, children's behaviour, infant nutrition, anaemia and parental care of children. Information meetings were organized during 1997 on several important topics including mother and child health care, personal cleanliness, pregnancy, breastfeeding and child nutrition, in addition to other topics such as environmental hygiene and safe life skills.

153. The Ministry of Health is now concentrating on developing comprehensive, effective health awareness, using material that takes into consideration the nature of the local communities, their values and traditions. These measures ensure that health messages are accessible to all members of society. This goal will be achieved through health institutions and schools across the Sultanate and through the efforts of voluntary support groups. These groups

are health support teams established by female volunteers in almost all villages of the Sultanate and work mainly on developing different health messages to support national health programmes.

154. The provision of birth spacing services began in the Sultanate in 1994 in the context of programmes for children and mothers. These services include information sessions to acquaint people with the available services and how to benefit from them. Special examinations and laboratory tests are available to women and statistics show that 12,949 women (65 per cent) under 30 took advantage of these services during 1997. A great decrease in the rate of Omani women's fertility has been observed during 1997; it is 4.8 children for each adult female, down from 7.8 in 1988. The Ministry of Health ensures free provision of contraceptives at the specialized centres.

155. There are currently intensive efforts being exerted to inform mothers about the positive effects of birth spacing, particularly in relation to mother and child health. These efforts are delivered through health institutions and are available in target community classes. To promote these efforts, an orientation campaign was started in 1996 lasting one month in all districts. The campaign, now organized annually in October each year, includes several activities stressing the benefits of birth spacing and explaining its health and social benefits. The Omani version of the Facts for Life book contains a full chapter on the importance of birth spacing. It is worth mentioning that thousands of copies of this book are printed and distributed to secondary school male and female students and to other citizens.

F. Protection against harmful traditional practices

156. There exist no studies that identify traditional practices detrimental to the child's health, even though female genital mutilation is practised within a narrow scope and is decreasing each year. Due to the increasing understanding about the injurious effects of female genital mutilation, there is a greater appreciation of its negative impact on girls' physical and psychological health.

157. There is continuous cooperation in this issue with WHO and UNICEF which provide financial and technical support for the implementation of various programmes. In addition, Gulf States cooperate and benefit from a broad range of experience and expertise about this practice.

G. Social security and the services rendered by the child care facilities

1. Right of all children to benefit from social security programmes

158. The Social Security Law (No. 87/84) provides for the care of orphans and other children in families without sufficient incomes, by granting them monthly payments. The number of orphans and other cases receiving monthly payments is 5,226. The sum of RO 2,22,669 had been spent on them as of October 1998 (being 13.4 per cent of the total allocation for this fund), making an average of RO 42,006 per case.

159. Concerning orphans and children of unknown parents requiring care in families other than their own, Ministerial Decision No. 96/88 has established an alternative family system and specified an allocation of funds to provide and extend this care for such children.

160. The benefits authorized by the Social Security Law are distributed on the basis of applications submitted by needy families. Benefits are approved according to the Law without discrimination as to the sex or social origin of the family.

2. The right to services and childcare

161. Raising an Omani child and the development of his/her abilities to play an effective role in the present and future development of the society are cornerstones of the nation's human resources development programme.

162. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, represented by the Woman and Child Affairs Directorate General, encourages the establishment of high quality nurseries. Standards for nurseries are described in the regulations for organizing nurseries (Ministerial Decision No. 19/90). The following table shows the allocation of these nurseries:

Table 4

Allocation of nurseries by region and gender of children

Area	Nurseries	Male	Female
Muscat Governorate	26	553	471
Dhofar Governorate	1 (Salalah)	10	15
Sharqiyah	1 Omani Woman Association (Sur)	3	3
Al Dhahirah	1 (Al Buraimi)	8	11
Total	29	579	500

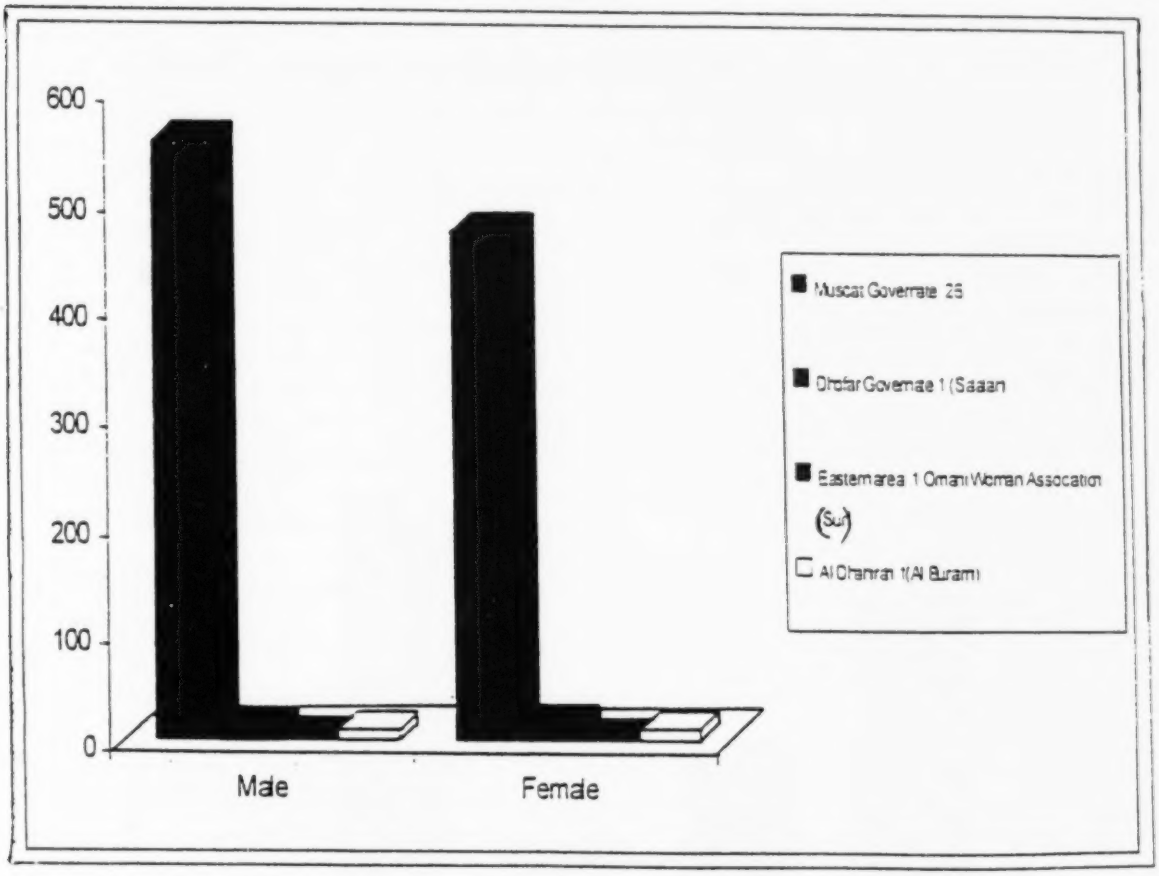


Figure 4

Allocation of nurseries

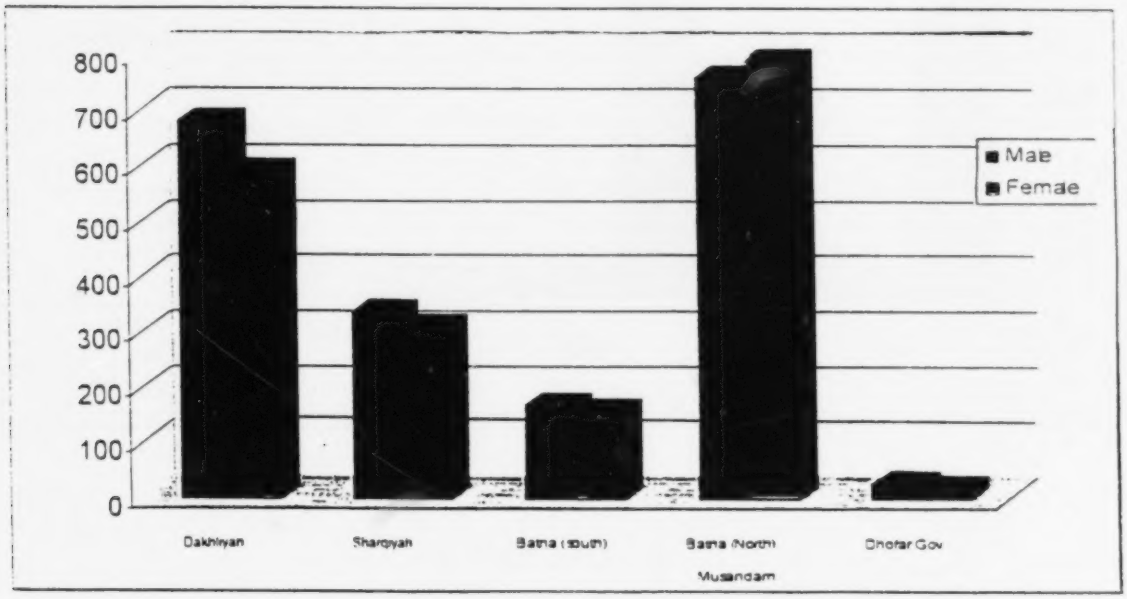
163. These nurseries create an environment appropriate to the child, satisfying his/her psychological needs, developing language skills, powers of observation, and nurturing spiritual and religious values.

164. Rural children receive care at the pre-school stage where the Ministry supervises the Rural Child Development Centres, admitting children 3-6 years old of both sexes. The Centres are staffed by volunteers with a board of directors constituted by individuals native to the area. The following table shows the areas of activity:

Table 5

Distribution of rural child development centres by region and gender of children

Area	No. of centres	Male	Female
Dakhliyah	16	681	589
Sharqiyah	7	336	310
Batna (South)	6	169	156
Batna (North) Musandam	13	761	789
Dhofar Gov.	1	25	17
Total	43	1 972	1 861



Rural child development centres

165. The Female Rehabilitation Centres, which are managed by the Woman and Child Affairs Directorate General, have children's corners within their premises providing cultural and educational services in rural and urban areas. The following table shows the allocation of children's corners and female development centres:

Table 6

Allocation of children's corners in women's development centres by region and gender of children

Area	No. of corners	No. of children	
		Male	Female
Muscat (Alkhoud)	3	52	67
Al Amrat		54	48
Qurayat		41	36
Al Batna	2	10	10
Shinas		53	35
Sohar			
Sharqiyah	4	48	45
Kamil and Wafi		54	59
Jaalan Bani Bu Hasan		10	6
Sinow		16	14
Samad Al Shan			
Al Dhahira	3	38	32
Buraimi		70	35
Danak (Alazizi)		39	34
Danak (Aniza)			
Dakhliyah (Bidbid)	1	66	43
Musandam Governorate	1	18	21
Total	14	569	485

Table 7

Children's corners of the Omani Woman Associations by region and gender of children

Area	No. of corners	No. of children	
		Male	Female
Sharqiyah			
Omani Woman Association - Ibra	1	33	65
Omani Woman Association - Mudaibi	1	29	24
Omani Woman Association - Qabil	1	30	40
Omani Woman Association - Bidiyah	1	75	44
Al Batnah			
Omani Woman Association - Saham	1	80	70
Omani Woman Association - Sinaw	1	19	21
Omani Woman Association - Khabora	1	57	67
Al Dhahra			
Omani Woman Association - Abri	1	33	33

Area	No. of corners	No. of children	
		Male	Female
Dakhliyah			
Women Assoc. Nizwa	1	121	277
Women Assoc. Tanoof	1	19	19
Women Assoc. Sumail	1	21	26
Total	11	517	686

166. These children's corners provide services to children in rural areas and villages.

167. The purpose and goals of children's corners and child development centres have been issued through Ministerial Decision No. 85/94. This decision establishes the activities of these corners as educational and cultural institutions to serve the child. Among their objectives is nurturing spiritual and religious values in children and enhancing their loyalty to the country by encouraging them to be good citizens. It also aims at developing their creative abilities. These corners provide services to children in towns and district capitals.

VII. EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

A. Education and vocational counselling and training

1. National educational strategy

168. Formal education in Oman was only begun with the advent of the Renaissance in Oman in 1970. Before then education was offered in only three elementary schools for boys in the cities of Muscat and Salalah. Since the advent of the Renaissance the country has faced the great challenge of providing educational services to all citizens in every community across the country. To carry out this task, the Government followed a comprehensive strategy to universalize education so that all citizens, including those deprived of an education before the Renaissance, could now have an education. That strategy was developed to rapidly and effectively provide education throughout the country.

169. In 1975 the Sultanate began comprehensive five-year development plans to ensure that education services were fairly funded. The Ministry of Education started setting up a series of five-year development plans applying a clear vision and far-reaching objectives. Each plan had the features of a short-term strategy as it contained specific objectives for each phase of development. The plans took into account the planning and organization of education and its diversification and promotion.

170. In 1995 a conference was convened on the future vision of Oman's economy in the year 2020. At that conference the issue of education was discussed as part of the human resources development agenda. A number of recommendations were adopted and sent to the Council of Ministers. Those decisions formed the general outline for a comprehensive education plan, the main objectives of which are:

(a) Continuing the spread of education throughout the country;

(b) Updating curricula to cope with scientific and technological advancement;

(c) Enhancing education in the direction of learning based on experience and practice;

(d) Promoting educational concepts according to modern educational technologies;

(e) Promoting and developing the teaching staff's technical and administrative skills;

(f) Consolidating the infrastructure of Basic Education and the goal of preparing well-qualified graduates for the labour market through technical education, vocational training and higher education;

(g) Identifying specific learning outcomes to ensure that graduates could, with little training, be absorbed by the labour market.

171. In January 1997 the Minister of Education made a statement before Majlis Al Shura, in which he specified trends and directions for education in Oman. His statement was a concise and comprehensive educational strategy whose aim was to update and promote general education within the context of the universalization of education. The most important features of that strategy are:

(a) Eliminating some patterns and methods the Ministry had earlier adopted as temporary means to implement the strategy of fast diffusion of education. One of those was the double-shift school system, which at one time had facilitated diffusion of education. This system could no longer meet the demands of education in terms of type and quality. The Ministry had to approach changing this system and adopt new objectives as well as updating existing objectives;

(b) Reconsidering the suitability of the present educational ladder and introduction of the Basic Education system, which is applied in many countries, as the most appropriate pattern of education and as recommended by international conferences;

(c) Introducing contemporary education concepts into curricula, methods of instruction, and science and technology;

(d) Improving educational evaluation systems, educational supervision and methods of measurement;

(e) Promoting the quality of training and professional development of teachers and administrators.

2. Provision of free educational services for children

172. Primary education is free of charge and available to all children in Oman willing to enrol. Access to education is facilitated by expansion in school construction, provision of transportation to schools and establishing student hostels in remote areas.

173. Secondary education is also free and accessible to all those who successfully complete the preparatory stage of education. Being keen to make available secondary education, the Ministry of Education constructed schools, well quipped with laboratories, libraries and other specialized rooms. In some schools hostels have been constructed for male and female students from remote areas who cannot be bussed every day to and from school. For those students who do not stay in hostels the Ministry of Education provides buses to transport them from their home to school and back.

174. Believing in the role of teachers in achieving the country's desired education level, the Ministry of Education had taken various measures and procedures including planning and implementing many short training courses, refresher courses, and other upgrading and professional training programmes. The Ministry also planned and implemented a one-year programme to professionally train graduates, inside and outside Oman, before they joined the teaching profession. Despite all these steps, there are not enough teachers to satisfy the needs of the Ministry. For this reason the Ministry has been recruiting expatriate teachers from friendly countries with attention given to selecting the best candidates in terms of qualifications, experience and competence. For its part the Ministry has improved working conditions for this category of teachers with respect to suitable housing, cash increments, and construction of housing clusters in remote areas.

175. According to the 1993 population census, the number of illiterate young people (under 18) were as follows: 4,412 males; 13,623 females; 18,035 total.

176. The Ministry has been rapidly constructing schools in order to abolish the existing double-shift school system and introduce the full-day system in order to provide children with the opportunity to spend more time in an integrated educational environment with sufficient time to engage in cocurricular activities. This plan which is part of the fifth five-year development plan (1996-2000), has as its main target to improve the quality of education, reduce the drop-out rate and increase the time students spend in school.

177. It is worth mentioning that there exist no regional or gender disparities in student enrolment because the Ministry makes education available for all those who reach school age, irrespective of gender or geographical location. Education statistics for 1997/98 show that the ratio of female students to the total number of students is 48.6 per cent (264,573 males and 249,742 females).

178. Non-Omani children enjoy the same rights to education offered to the Omani children, provided that their mother tongue is Arabic. Children from non-Arab nationalities have the option to attend foreign community schools.

179. The following statistical table shows the development that has taken place in female education at various levels of education and is evidence of equal opportunity for females to access Government-sponsored schools.

Table 8

Development of student enrolment, 1993-1998

Year	Total No. of students	Male		Female	
		Number	%	Number	%
93/94	448 977	234 027	52.1	214 950	47.9
94/95	469 849	243 586	51.8	226 263	48.2
95/96	488 797	252 466	51.7	236 331	48.3
96/97	502 674	259 103	51.5	243 571	48.5
97/98	514 315	264 573	51.5	249 742	48.5

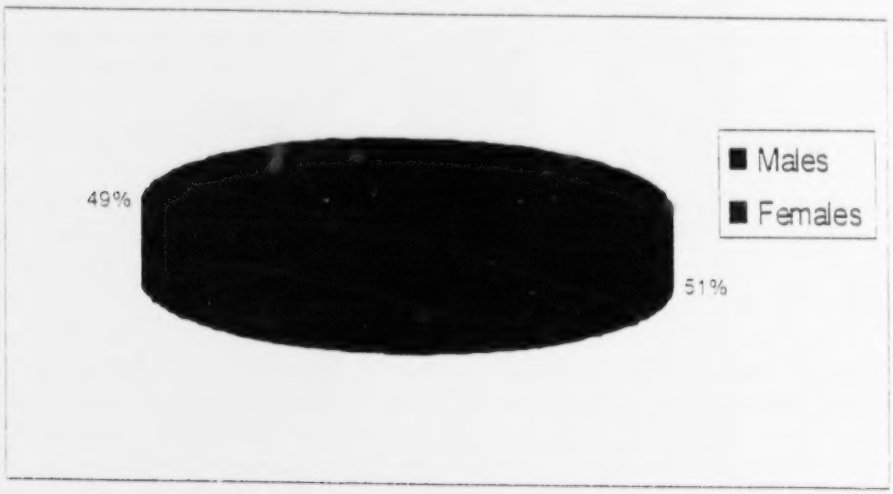


Figure 6

School Year 1997/98

Table 9

Distribution of general education school students by level and gender, 1997/98

Level	Male	Female	Female ratio (%)
Primary	155 486	144 784	48.2
Preparatory	69 677	63 241	47.6
Secondary	39 410	41 717	51.4

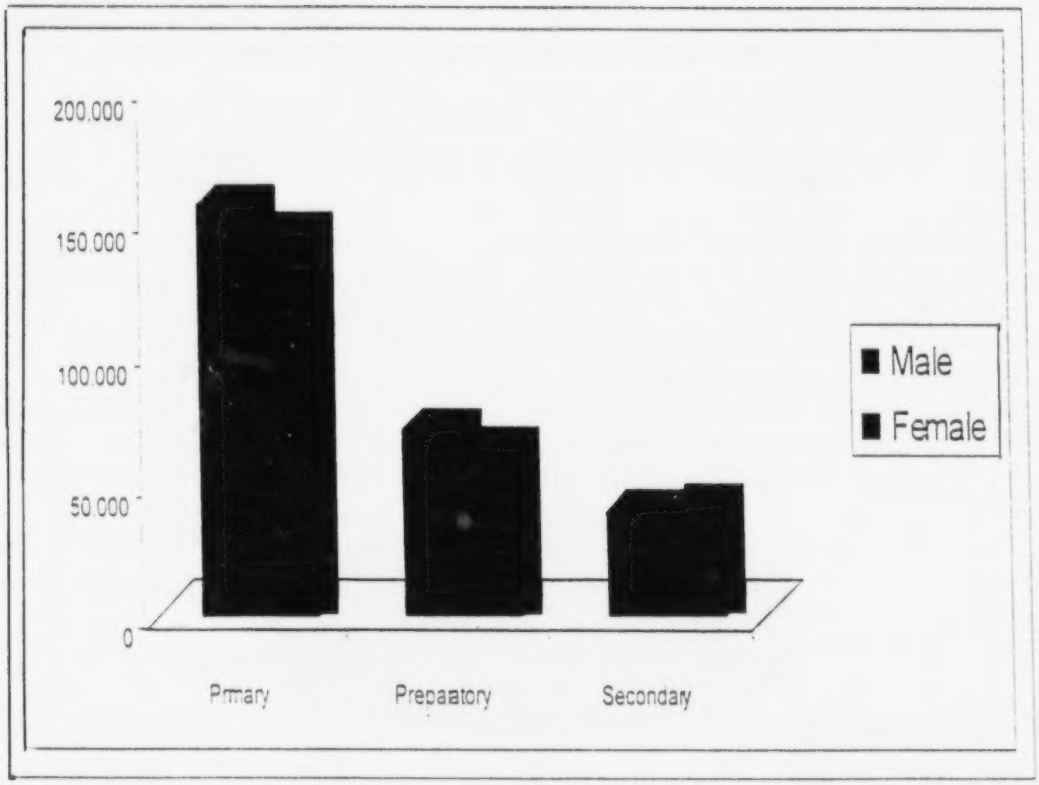


Figure 7

Distribution of general education school students by age, 1997/98

3. Role of the private sector

180. The private sector has been contributing to the efforts of the Ministry of Education by providing educational services to children in the Sultanate. That contribution is in the form of construction and administration of private schools at the three levels of education (primary, preparatory and secondary). The private sector has alone set up pre-school education centres (i.e. nurseries and kindergartens) as independent centres or in affiliation with private schools.

181. Owing to its care in ensuring the interest of the child, the Ministry of Education issued the Organizational Statutes of the Private School which cover the basic rules and regulations binding private schools. The Statutes require that the educational services they offer shall not be less than the services made available at government schools. Accordingly, educational considerations receive top priority when determining the interests of children/students enrolled. The Organizational Statutes developed by the Ministry of Education for the private schools include the following:

(a) School premises should meet the educational and hygienic provisions;

(b) Appropriate furniture, equipment and toys;

(c) Appropriate teaching staff, supervisors and other technical support staff;

(d) Appropriate curricula and education programmes;

(e) Appropriate school discipline.

182. The Ministry gives careful attention to the pre-school level of education because of its impact in determining the future education of Omani youth. The Ministry gives special attention to kindergartens. In spite of the fact that it is only the private sector that has been involved in kindergarten education, the Ministry of Education has developed an advanced Omani curriculum structured within the context of Omani culture and society and which meets the needs of Omani children. The Ministry also prepares and trains female kindergarten teachers and arranges in-service training for them.

183. In order to make sure that the interests of the Omani child are secured, the Ministry has been carrying out tasks such as administrative and technical supervision of private schools. Its supervisory bodies on the central and the regional levels ensure that these schools and their administration function according to the criteria approved by the Ministry and meet the provisions of article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

184. In line with the private school regulations presently in force, these schools are committed to implementing the Omani government schools curricula. They are also allowed to add other educational components to their curricula or co-curricular activities with the approval of the Ministry of Education.

4. Vocational training

(a) Total local, regional and central budgetary allocations for multi-level vocational training of children

185. The budgets allocated for vocational training and technical education include funding vocational training programmes (note the definition of "the child" as it is stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child). Additional training services are available for children all over the country to ease their transition to training sites. The Government also provides funds to support private-sector training programmes by covering the training fees of students enrolled in private training centres. The funds provided by the Government cover the cost of accommodation and meals for the trainees and a monthly bursary for those enrolled in the training centres administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, and Vocational Training.

(b) Measures and mechanisms developed to ensure that children willing to access vocational training are enrolled

186. Training programmes are accessible to all qualified persons regardless of gender, provided that security measures are ensured during the training. Children with special needs who are not capable of enrolling in government vocational training centres or private-sector

training centres or those with disabilities obstructing them from undertaking normal training activities are given special attention. To accommodate the needs of these disabled persons some institutions have been assigned the task of rehabilitating them professionally and socially. These institutions take into consideration individual needs and offer appropriate training services.

187. Females are offered training services by private-sector training institutions and other departments in the Ministry.

188. It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training has implemented female training programmes which covered 14 female rehabilitation centres, 43 rural women's development centres and 160 private-sector centres all over the Sultanate.

(c) Measures taken to ensure the provision of an adequate number of teachers specialized in vocational training, and evaluation of the quality of training

189. Teachers and trainers with the appropriate academic qualifications are regularly recruited to implement approved training programmes. On-the-job education programmes are provided to maintain the expected level of efficiency. Additionally, trainers are sent abroad for advanced training courses; this has had a positive impact on the success of the training process.

(d) Measures taken to provide appropriate facilities and making them accessible to all children

190. Children willing to enrol in vocational training centres are offered accommodation, meals and transportation. Additionally, training programmes are delivered at trainees' homes as far as is possible, coupled with flexible conditions of enrolment.

(e) Measures taken to ensure compatibility of vocational training programmes with the requirements of the labour market

191. Counselling services are offered side by side with training programmes. These services include conducting field studies to assess students' living conditions and their behaviour patterns, which assists in identifying ways of utilizing leisure time constructively. These services enhance trainees' social, psychological and physiological conditions through involvement in social, cultural and sports activities.

192. These activities include pre-employment programmes that prepare trainees for the labour market and employment in appropriate jobs and clarify the benefits available to employees in the private sector such as social insurance. Participants become acquainted with employment resources, acquiring skills for job search and finding the road to success in work. After graduation a follow-up programme is implemented.

(f) Mechanisms developed to link vocational training programmes with employment

193. The mechanism linking vocational training programmes with employment ensures compatibility of the learning outcomes with the labour market. This system requires placement

of trainees in work sites with the aim of on-the-job orientation before they start training. This mechanism is documented by the Labour Department and matches the requirements of available jobs.

B. Objectives of education and the school management system

1. Objectives of education

194. The Basic Education programme beginning in 1998/99 takes into account the relevant articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These sections describe the child's right to an education that assists them to develop their character, talents and mental and physical capabilities. The programme also prepares them for a socially conscientious life and fine-tunes their awareness of the environment and the best means to use it in the best interests of society.

195. This approach contextualizes objectives, standpoints, and the curricular content of education in each syllabus. To develop student characters and achieve the target objective of an integrated education, the Ministry of Education has established a technical office in the Directorate General for Training and Curriculum to enhance the education of students in the early grades. One of the responsibilities of this office is to monitor and measure the extent to which the new curriculum realizes their educational objectives.

196. The curricula of the three educational levels (primary, preparatory, secondary) currently implemented in the Omani schools ensure a balanced education for children. It includes appropriate knowledge, attitudes, values and skills to assist children for their future roles in society.

197. An integrated information media plan is being implemented to launch an information programme on child rights using the press, radio and television. The plan includes programmes addressed to teachers and other staff involved in education. Seminars and meetings will publicize the provisions and principles of the Convention among students, parents and families. Co-curricular activities, such as school radio and posters, will be used for the same purpose.

198. The Ministry of Education is implementing education reform policies within the context of plans to promote new instructional methods and updated curricula. These are seen to be of paramount importance for the development of the child's character, skills, and physical and mental potential. The new programmes will introduce sports, visual arts and musical activities and incorporate the new subject of "life skills". This new subject area will create a linkage between the child and life requirements.

2. Respect for children's views in management of the school

199. After successfully completing the first year of secondary school students are permitted freedom to choose a subject specialization area, arts or sciences. The school gives counselling appropriate to the student's academic abilities and achievements. The student shall retain the right to choose the specialization area he/she will study.

200. The child is given the opportunity to contribute to decision-making at the school through a number of means, which include:

(a) Class boards. Article 35 of the Organizational Statutes of General Education Schools stipulates that students in each class, starting with grade 4, shall elect four individuals to represent them in social, cultural, sports and art activities. The students elected form the "class board". The mandate and accountabilities conferred upon the Board within the context of affecting decision-making include:

(i) Supervising students' morning assembly, classroom control, and cleanliness;

(ii) Endeavouring to involve each student in his/her classes and in at least one school co-curricular group;

(iii) Organizing cultural and social functions for students, parents and teachers;

(iv) Organizing class trips and visits to the local community, local institutions and the officials in charge;

(v) Building up class libraries, organizing projects to be studied and implemented by their classmates and assigning tasks to students as a group;

(b) School activity groups. All general education schools are obliged to form school activity groups to provide students with the opportunities necessary for them to acquire practical and mental skills, express their views, make appropriate decisions, and shoulder the responsibilities of organizing and implementing such activities. Articles 30 to 33 of the Organizational Statutes of the General Education Schools specify the objectives of these school activity groups, their functions and limitations;

(c) Training of teachers to initiate children's involvement and partnership in school curricula. The macro objectives of education in the Sultanate aim to prepare an educated citizen with a sense of independence and positive conduct. This objective has emphasized school curricula addressing students according to their age and ability. Lesson contents, curricular activities and methods of instruction and evaluation are all developed to match these objectives. The Ministry of Education has developed a teacher in-service training plan, to be implemented between 1996 and 2000, which includes a number of training programmes focusing on teachers' skills and developing their competencies in providing a child-centred education. These programmes include:

(i) Developing students' reading potential;

(ii) Familiarizing teachers with the methods required to stimulate students' learning skills and abilities;

(iii) Developing teachers' skills in using a variety of instructional methods and motivation techniques;

(iv) Sharpening teachers' skills in reinforcing pupils' views within the learning process;

(v) Consolidating positive attitudes of students and encouraging them to interact within a democratic setting;

(d) Initiation and stimulation of students. To realize this, the following steps are to be taken by teachers:

(i) Encourage pupils to investigate, deduce facts, and develop a scientific manner of thinking;

(ii) Encourage and assist pupils to develop a variety of learning skills;

(iii) Assist pupils to develop their sense of responsibility and individual thinking;

(iv) Stimulate pupils' creativity and productivity;

(e) Individualization of education and learning. To realize this objective, the following steps are to be taken:

(i) Assisting teachers to understand individual differences among various student groups;

(ii) Developing teachers' ability to encourage students' self-learning;

(iii) Consolidating teachers' skills to organize student activities that comply with the approved co-curricula activities;

(iv) Acquainting teachers with the special methods of teaching which match the varied abilities and competencies of individual students.

3. Measures taken to prevent students being subjected to severe or humiliating treatment or punishment

201. The Ministry of Education has taken appropriate measures to prevent students from being subjected to severe treatment and punishment. The Organizational Statutes of the General Education Schools clearly indicate that corporal punishment is banned and that students cannot be insulted or treated harshly. The Statues include a provision for warning individuals who violate these provisions.

202. The provisions prohibiting mistreatment of students are widely disseminated within educational institutions. School discipline must be applied equitably, and parent boards have been vigilant in ensuring that these provisions are implemented. The school media, posters and radio all play a role in informing students and teachers about these provisions.

C. Leisure time, recreation and cultural activities (art. 31)

203. To ensure the child's right to leisure, sports and recreational activities suitable to its age and the active participation of the child in school activities, the Ministry of Education has constituted a department for educational festivals and activities to make available to students opportunities for recreation and cultural activities. This is achieved through various activities and programmes implemented throughout the school year within the regular school curricula. Some of these school activities include:

(a) Sports. The following activities are included:

(i) Contests and tournaments such as football, basketball, volleyball and athletics at school and regional levels. Prizes and trophies are offered;

(ii) Provision of playgrounds and adequate equipment in school buildings;

(iii) The inclusion of physical education classes in the school curricular programmes at all levels of education to enable students to participate regularly in educational games and activities supervised by physical education teachers;

(iv) The setting up of a supervisory body of physical education teachers for implementation and evaluation;

(v) Participation in nationwide festivals and other local, international and Arab-sponsored events involving student sports teams;

(b) School scout groups. In this area the following activities are organized:

(i) School scouting activities in educational regions are supervised by the General Authority for Scouts. Students are engaged in these activities which are monitored by school supervisors. Scout groups are provided with the necessary equipment and materials;

(ii) Local, regional (Gulf countries) and international scout camps are organized for male and female groups;

(iii) Scout groups participate in national and international celebrations and festivals;

(c) Visual and performing arts. These activities include the following:

(i) Formal lessons included in school programmes for art education and music education;

(ii) Provision of trained teachers and supervisors to teach and evaluate art and music education programmes in schools;

(iii) Provision of rooms for art and music activities equipped with proper equipment and space;

(iv) Participation of students in local, Arab and international events such as art exhibitions, plays, music, etc.;

(v) Participation in local, regional and international competitions, festivals, and events;

(vi) Participation in local, regional, Arab and international competitions and contests such as civil defence contests, schoolchildren's drawing contests, drawing exhibitions in collaboration with children of the United Arab Emirates. Gulf Cooperation Council traffic week contests, contests in Doha, Marine Environment Reservation contests, "Egypt in the eyes of the world" children's international contest, talented child contests, safe maternity contests, environment preservation contests, and writing and designing school posters;

(d) Cultural contests. These include the following: competitions for talented children, essays on the environment, creative writing, and poetry; school journalism; school broadcasting service; photography; Arabic calligraphy; magazines; National days issues; children's literature (primary level); plays; drama presentations; drama writing; puppet shows; choral music;

(e) Cultural and social activities. These are school-based activities practised by various student groups and include: school journalism; school broadcasting; photography; debates; excursions; health and hygiene; cooperative societies; library society; Islamic education society; science society; English language society; public service society.

204. All of these activities are practised under the supervision of specialized teachers. They have budgets allocated for them and help to develop children's talents.

205. Through the Department of Information, the Ministry publicizes these student functions and creative activities in the press, television and radio. In addition, the Ministry encourages early development of students' talents and provides support for their participation in local, Arab and international festivals and competitions. Full media coverage is given to these activities.

D. Youth, sports and cultural activities

206. Activities administered by the Public Authority for Youth, Sports and Cultural Activities include the following.

1. Scientific Club

207. Scientific activities offered within the Scientific Club and its branches in the regions include:

(a) The first course, in computer systems operations, was organized in 1998 with 25 children involved;

(b) The second course, for girls, was organized with 18 girls taking part;

(c) The third course, an introduction to programming, was organized with 24 participants;

(d) The fourth course, in computer languages, had 21 participants;

(e) The fifth course, for training girls in the use of information systems, involved 29 girls;

(f) The sixth course was conducted for training boys in the use of the computer.

2. Sports

208. Oman, aware of the physical, psychological, educational and emotional advantages and benefits of such activities, has been making intensive efforts to encourage youth to practise various sports. There are 50 sport clubs in Oman, all of which host young members below the age of 18. These young members participate in all local, regional and international sport functions under the supervision of experts in various aspects of sport. Additionally, there are 12 children's leisure sport leagues.

3. Social and cultural activities

209. Within the scope of activities intended to encourage innovation and creativity in children, there are, in addition to the scientific and physical activities, other activities available to children. These activities include fine arts, drawing, drama, special activities for young girls, camping and scout groups. It is worth mentioning here that the National Authority for Scouts was established in 1975.

E. Local activities

210. The municipalities of Oman have been performing their role in maintaining clean and healthy recreational resorts and parks. There are 44 municipalities with 14 rural branches and 22 public health officers in remote areas. Following are some of the tasks implemented and supervised locally:

(a) Planning and maintenance of residential quarters;

(b) Gardening; setting up of parks and green areas and provision of recreational facilities. Parks and green areas have spread throughout all towns and villages of the Sultanate, thus providing children with safe and clean areas for play and recreation;

(c) Preparing beaches to offer healthy resorts for people, young and old, equipped with all facilities required;

(d) Establishing and maintaining the natural reserves where people can enjoy many species of animals, plants, fish and birds, and the still nature of mountains around, composing a panorama of the Omani nature.

211. The Sultanate of Oman is one of the top 10 countries of the world most attentive to environmental preservation and development. A day is annually celebrated in Oman as "Environment Day" and a month every year is marked as "Municipalties and Environment Month".

212. In 1996 Muscat municipality has been awarded "First Rank" title in the Arab Towns Organization contest.

F. The Children's Museum

213. In addition to the host of museums and historical sites and monuments in Oman, the Sultanate has taken a pioneering step in setting up a museum for children equipped with state-of-the-art technology and offering children plenty of education-oriented fun which is intended to enhance their experiences and expose the world of information and knowledge to their young minds.

VIII. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

A. Refugee children (art. 22)

214. Article 36 of the Basic Law of the State deals with issues of political asylum and prohibiting extradition of refugees. Laws and international treaties shall regulate provisions of extradition of criminals.

215. Chapter Seven of the Foreigners Sojourn Law regulates provisions of political asylum (24-27).

B. Children subject to the juvenile justice system (art. 40)

1. The child's right to procedures consistent with his age and special position

216. The Omani Penal Law issued by Royal Decree No. 7/74 contained several provisions relating to the child consistent with the provisions of article 40 of the Convention. Under this

law juveniles less than 18 years old are treated in a manner suitable to their age that preserves their dignity and encourages their sense of belonging to their society (sects. 1.1.2 and 2.4).

217. Sections II and III of this report contain basic data on child criminal accountability and the measures taken or planned to protect children against delinquency. Priority is given to reforming and equipping delinquent juveniles to play a constructive role in society. The additional information provided here on the juvenile justice system conforms to the provisions of article 40 of the Convention and the commitment to implement its general principles.

2. The principle of legality of crimes and penalties

218. Article 21 of the Basic Law of the State provides that "no crime and no penalty [exist] except by virtue of law, and no punishment except for acts following enforcement of law providing for it", and that punishment is against an individual, not a family or relatives.

219. Section 1 of the Omani Penal Law provides, "no act is an offence in the absence of a relevant provision", and "no punishment shall be inflicted which is not provided for at the commission of the offence. The offence is deemed to be committed immediately on occurrence of its acts without regard to the time of its result."

3. The principle of presumption of innocence

220. Article 22 of the Basic Law of the State provides that the accused is innocent until his guilt is proved by a legal trial in which the necessary guarantees have been secured, including the right of self-defence in accordance with the law. Bodily or mental injury to the accused is forbidden.

4. The right to special proceedings and the right of self-defence

221. The criminal law procedures generally protect the right of self-defence and section 15, in particular, provides that: "If public prosecution is initiated against a minor under 18 years of age, the court or general prosecutor shall order his guardian or custodian or whoever is in charge of his patronage, to attend with him during all proceedings and assist him to defend his case. In cases of necessity the court shall appoint a guardian at litigation."

222. It is anticipated that improvements will be introduced into the administration of the juvenile justice system under the juvenile law bill. This bill requires that a competent judicial tribunal deal with juvenile affairs subject to a system of special proceedings and in accordance with the provisions of article 40 of the Convention.

5. The right to enjoy a special punishment system (juvenile court system)

223. Section II of this report contains a definition of "child" and particulars about the age of criminal responsibility, emphasizing that the minimum age for imprisoning a child is 13 years. Minors enjoy a special mitigated punishment system until the age of 18. Omani penal law prohibits in all cases infliction of the death sentence or life imprisonment on those less than 18 years (see sect. II.D of this report).

224. The Sultanate's criminal court presently hears cases involving juvenile offences. To implement the principles of the Basic Statute of the State (sect. 38), officials are currently studying a juvenile law bill which would establish special courts for juveniles. Additionally, the draft law on the organization of the judiciary provides for establishing a juvenile court system with judges having specialized knowledge of juvenile law.

225. The Royal Oman Police (ROP), in conjunction with other related authorities, is also endeavouring to rehabilitate and reform juvenile offenders by supporting the enactment of the juvenile law and establishment of a physical facility (penitentiary) exclusively for juveniles. The ROP supports a special administration for juveniles established within the General Administration of Criminal Inquiries and Investigations that would:

- Coordinate government agencies responsible for rehabilitation and reform including the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs; other governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations;

- Participate in preliminary investigation of major criminal cases and attend hearings and trials;

- Conduct research and studies about offenders in criminal cases.

6. Children deprived of their liberty and the juvenile prison system

226. Article 18 of the Basic Law of the State provides that "personal freedom is guaranteed according to the law, and no person may be apprehended, searched, detained or arrested, freedom of movement shall not be restricted except in accordance with the law".

227. Section 256 of Omani Penal Law provides: "Whoever deprives another of his personal freedom by abduction or any other means, shall be punished with imprisonment of six months up to two years."

228. Concerning the treatment of juvenile prisoners the Prisons Regulation System No. 28/94 provides in section 21/7 that "prisoners under 18 years shall be isolated from other prisoners in their living quarters, bathrooms and during leisure time exercises". Also, section 37.1 of the Prisons Regulation System provides that each prisoner may, under appropriate conditions, meet his family and his friends of sound repute twice a month provided they shall not exceed six in number at each visit and that the visit's duration shall not exceed half an hour and take place during working hours and in the place designated for this purpose under the supervision of the records officer.

229. The Prisons Regulation System states in the sections on children's educational and medical services that the juvenile's cultural, educational and sports activities during his imprisonment shall be determined in the light of his requirements for medical care (sects. 26-31 and 59/1 on health services for prisoners).

230. The juvenile prisons system is expected to witness rapid improvements by virtue of the Prisons Law.

7. Physical, psychological and social rehabilitation of the child

231. After arresting a minor, an inquiry about his character, social atmosphere, and any previous criminal activities is conducted before sending him to trial. This inquiry is compulsory where the offence committed is a felony. The court shall assign a judge competent in juvenile affairs to conduct an inquiry into the acts attributed to the juvenile and the reasons that led to them. Afterwards, the judge will determine whether the minor will be incarcerated where he will be rehabilitated in order for him to reform and readapt into society. The Royal Oman Police endeavours, in coordination with concerned bodies, to ensure that penal institutions help to rehabilitate the juvenile.

C. Children subject to exploitation, including physical and psychological exploitation

1. Economic exploitation and employment of children (art. 32)

232. This report has previously referred to the non-existence of children's economic exploitation by way of employment of underage children.

233. The State endeavours to incorporate additional protective measures by raising the minimum age for employment (completion age of Basic Education) and other measures previously detailed in section II.C of this report.

2. Drug abuse (art. 33)

234. Section 229 of the Omani Penal Law provides that: whoever trades in drugs shall be punished with imprisonment for 3 to 10 years and a fine of RO 300 to 500 and shall be punished with the same punishment as someone who possesses drugs with the intention of providing them to others or facilitating their use. Under section 114 of this law the punishment will be heavier if the person being supplied with or assisted to use drugs is under 18 or an addict.

3. Sexual exploitation and sexual assault (art. 34)

235. This article is dealt with in the Omani Penal Law under the following sections:

(a) Section 218/3 penalizes persons who commit fornication on a person under 15 years of age or who is physically or mentally deficient, regardless of whether the act involves coercion, intimidation or seduction or whether the offender is a relative or guardian of the person assaulted or has power over him/her or is a servant of such person;

(b) Section 220: Whoever by coercion, intimidation or seduction causes a person to commit fornication or prostitution shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of three to five years. If the person assaulted is less than 18 years of age imprisonment shall not be for less than five years;

(c) Section 221 states: Whoever on his subsistence relies, wholly or partly, on gains derived from fornication or prostitution practised under his protection or influence of dominance, shall be punished with imprisonment for three months to three years and a fine of RO 20-100.

236. The Sultanate of Oman has entered into several conventions aiming at the eradication of various forms of child sexual exploitation and sexual assault. The most prominent of these conventions are:

(a) The Security Agreement between the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ratified by Royal Decree No. 32/82;

(b) The Security Agreement among the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council countries, ratified by Royal Decree No. 11/95;

(c) The Agreement with GCC countries for the Execution of Judgements and Orders and Judicial Summons, ratified by Royal Decree No. 17/96;

(d) The Joint Cooperation Agreement between the Sultanate and the Republic of India, ratified by the Royal Decree No. 107/96.

237. The Sultanate joined Interpol in 1973, thereby participating in meetings convened within the scope of this organization and endeavours to implement recommendations emerging from them.

4. Abduction, sale and trafficking of children (art. 35)

238. This subject is dealt with by the following sections of Omani Penal Law:

(a) Section 256 states: whoever deprives another of his personal freedom by abduction or any other means, shall be punished with imprisonment of six months to two years;

(b) Section 257: he shall be punished with the same as in section 256 whoever knowingly conceals an abducted person;

(c) Section 258: the abductor shall be punished with imprisonment for not less than 15 years if:

(i) The deprivation of liberty exceeds one month;

(ii) The abduction has occurred by force, coercion or seduction;

(iii) The abducted person has been subjected to actions of physical or mental torture or his/her honour is disgraced or he/she forced to practise prostitution;

(iv) The intention behind the abduction is extortion or forcing another person to pay ransom;

(v) The act has been committed against an official during the course of his official duty;

(d) Section 259 states: the offender shall be allowed a mitigating plea if he releases the abducted person within 24 hours without another offence or a misdemeanour or felony being committed except in the case aforementioned in the preceding paragraph, where the offender will not be allowed any plea or mitigating cause;

(e) Section 260: whoever deports or puts a person in a state similar to slavery shall be punished with imprisonment for 5-15 years;

(f) Section 261: whoever causes a person to enter into or depart from the territories of Oman in a state of servitude or slavery or thereby disposes of him or in any way receives, possesses, acquires or maintains him in such state, shall be punished with imprisonment for 3-5 years.

IX. SUGGESTED FUTURE STEPS FOR BETTER COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN LEGISLATION, NATIONAL POLICY AND THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONVENTION

239. The National Committee for the Follow-up of the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has publicized the provisions and principles of the Convention and coordinated the various governmental and non-governmental efforts.

240. Workshops organized between 1997 and 1998 have implemented an integrated strategy giving support and publicity to the provisions of the Convention.

241. Within this context plans are under way, in collaboration with UNICEF, to publish information bulletins and leaflets as part of the Social Work Plan for 1999.

242. Following training of the first cohort of trainers, it has been planned that the second batch of trainers were to spread throughout the various districts to publicize the Convention among the citizens, which comes within the Social Work Plan of 1999.

243. Plans have been set to conduct studies with the intention of surveying public awareness of the articles of the Convention. The outcomes of these studies will guide future plans.

244. Below are some indicators given as examples reflecting the features of social work and policies until year 2000, which marks the end of the fifth five-year plan. These indicators are derived from the programmes and projects that are included as basic components of the five-year plans of the Sultanate. The objectives of these plans were to ensure the child's survival, protection and development. The following table shows the allocations approved for new development projects in the areas stated:

Table 10

Allocations for development projects

New development projects	Allocation as a % of development budget
Education	23.4
Health	4.9
Housing	1.7
Electricity	4.7
Culture and information	2.0
Social care	0.1
Protection of the environment	0.3

245. The five-year development plans of the Sultanate are based on the type and level of the sectors targeted and on regional levels in order to ensure that distribution of development outcomes reaches all populations equitably (children included), without discrimination. It is worth mentioning that these plans are implemented through flexible mechanisms which would guarantee that any emergent matters and incidentals could smoothly be accommodated.

246. For further elucidation, the following child-related macro objectives of future planning are viewed as part of the Sultanate's national policy:

1. Provision of free education for all children of school age as well as promotion of education at all levels.

2. Provision of free basic health care for all Omanis.

3. Improving the quality of education and health services and promoting the cost effectiveness of such services at all levels.

4. Encouraging technical education and vocational training.

5. Increasing the per capita income of the total domestic product by an annual average of 0.5 per cent.

6. Achieving an average annual growth of the domestic product of 4.6 per cent according to current rates.

List of appendices*

1. The Basic Law of the State (Royal Decree No. 101/96).

2. The Personal Law (Royal Decree No. 32/97).

3. Omani Penal Law (Royal Decree No. 7/74).

4. Royal Decree No. 94/85 establishing the National Committee for the Child Care.

5. Regulations regarding children in need of care issued by the decision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training No. 96/3.

6. The Nurseries Regulations issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training No. 19/95.

7. Fathers' Boards Regulations issued by the decision of the Ministry of Education No. 17/92.

8. Mothers' Boards Regulations issued by the decision of the Ministry of Education No. 18/92.

9. The Ministry of Health Decision No. 3/80 on reporting of births, deaths, and epidemic diseases.

10. The Ministry of Health Decision No. 18/77 on immunization of children against epidemic diseases.

11. Foreigner's Sojourn Law.

12. The Social Security Law.

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* The documents may be consulted at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.